OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

THE MAKING OF OPERATION WOLF
PULLING THE TRIGGER ON TAITO'S ARCADE SMASH

ULTIMATE GUIDE: THE GREAT ESCAPE
REVISITING DENTON DESIGNS' ISOMETRIC WWII MASTERPIECE

THE MAKING OF MAGICLAND DIZZY
BIG RED SOFTWARE REVEALS HOW IT CRACKED DIZZY'S FOURTH ADVENTURE

ALSO INSIDE
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS
JAMES BOND 007: NIGHTFIRE
MISSION IMPOSSIBUBBLE
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
COVERMOUNT CORNER
WING COMMANDER
SILENT HILL F
HOMEBREW
ATLANTIS

Simon the Sorcerer
BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE MAGICAL SERIES

THE EVOLUTION OF BANJO-KAZOOIE
FROM N64 DEBUT TO NUTS & BOLTS: THE CREATIVES BEHIND THE HIT PLATFORMING SERIES BEAR ALL

CREATING LUMINES: PUZZLE FUSION
TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI RETURNS TO HIS MAGNIFICENT HIT PUZZLER

MAGAZINE CRAFT: STEVE JARRATT
FROM ZZAP!64 TO TOTAL!, EDGE AND A NEW BEGINNING IN BOOKS

THE MAKING OF KILL.SWITCH
HOW NAMCO'S GAME HELPED INSPIRE THE COVER-SHOOTER

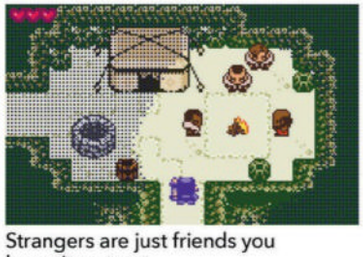
FUTURE
LOAD 278

RATCHETEER DX

EVERYONE LOVES A SNOW DAY.

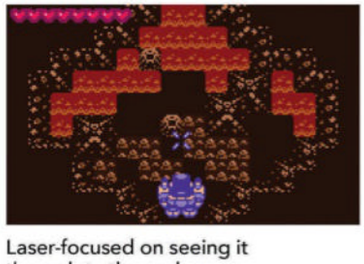
In ***RATCHETEER DX***, your mentor mechanic is abducted during some unplanned maintenance, setting off a lo-fi, top-down, action-adventure.

This Playdate® classic has been colorfully reimagined for Mac, PC and Switch, and now you–the Retro Gamer reader–can grab an exclusive demo at **https://secretdemo.zone**!


Strangers are just friends you haven't met yet.

Fixated on fixing a retired, pre-Impact steam mech.

The uninhabitable Surface, not so uninhabited.


Laser-focused on seeing it through to the end.

Published by Panic®

COMING SOON TO

LOADING...

This is an unpopular take, but I've always preferred *Banjo-Kazooie* to *Super Mario 64*. There's no denying that Nintendo's offering is arguably one of the most important games of all time, but I do love the shenanigans of that bear and bird. From that chaotic musical opening to the final showdown with the rhyming Gruntilda, it's a game that's bubbling over with charm and character and it left a huge impression on me the first time I played it. I went through it again a few years back and it has lost none of its appeal. It's a delight then to talk to many of the team members who brought Banjo and Kazooie to life, and we've looked at all the games in the series to date (be sure to play *Grunty's Revenge* on the GBA, as it's a real treat).

Outside of our extensive *Banjo-Kazooie* coverage, we've got some superb Making Of articles for you, including the legendary coin-op hit *Operation Wolf*, Tetsuya Mizuguchi's *Lumines: Puzzle Fusion*, *Magicland Dizzy* and the highly underrated *kill.switch*. We talk to Steve Jarratt about his impressive career in gaming magazines, chat to the many creatives who worked on the *Simon The Sorcerer* games and revisit Denton Designs' *The Great Escape*. All of this and there's a great subs offer for you on page 32.

Stay safe, and enjoy the magazine.

THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE LIGHTGUN GAME?

DARRAN JONES

Dead Space: Extraction is a brilliant story-based shooter and it's a crying shame we didn't get more lightgun games like it.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *The Lord Of The Rings: The Third Age*
Favourite game of all time: *Strider*

TIM EMPEY

Has to be *Operation Wolf* for me. I'm pretty sure there was a cabinet with the Uzi in the Craigavon Shopping Centre, just past Crazy Prices.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go.
Currently playing: *Deep Rock Galactic: Survivor*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

Oh no! *Time Crisis* or *Ghost Squad*? I probably put more money into the latter, and still carry the memory card around just in case.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Blippo+*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

Turns out if you play *Operation Wolf* on PC via an emulator and use a mouse, it becomes one of the easiest games ever.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

PAUL ROSE

It's hard to beat *Virtua Cop* for me.
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Doom: The Dark Ages*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

GRAEME MASON

It will always be *Operation Wolf* for me. I'll never forget the thrill of wielding that Uzi and mowing down hordes of enemy soldiers.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Fobia – St Dinfa Hotel*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

ASHLEY DAY

For me, *Ghost Squad* is the pinnacle of lightgun games. I was obsessed with the Wii version for months!
Expertise: The games of Team17, the CD32, Sega and the *Shining Force* series
Currently playing: *Dead Of The Brain*
Favourite game of all time: *Shining Force III*

ANDREW FISHER

Space Gun – combining *Operation Thunderbolt* with *Aliens* was a genius move.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *An Adventure In Time*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

RORY MILNE

I have fond memories of *Virtua Cop*. It's got more style than substance and is on the short side, but there's still a lot of fun to be had from playing it.
Expertise: The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing
Currently playing: *Metroid Prime*
Favourite game of all time: *Tempest*

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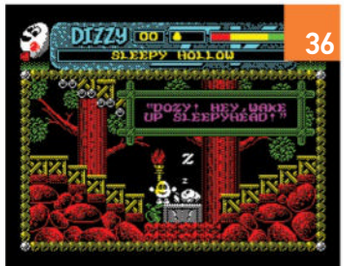

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Ultimate Guide: The Great Escape

Graeme Mason breaks out of prison to deliver his verdict on the Spectrum classic

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» As you can see, the Vectrex Mini looks to recreate the original Eighties console in faithful miniature form.

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It's time for Nick to once again brave the time lines and travel back to an era of gaming when things were far simpler

VERY SMALL VECTREX

David Oghia tells all about the upcoming mini console

Few gaming devices of any kind can match the cool factor of the Vectrex. There has never been anything like the self-contained console with the vector display, and thanks to the obsolescence of the technology, there will never be anything like it again. That makes it a hot commodity in the collector's market, which has put it out of reach of many players, but now the Vectrex Mini is on the way – an all-in-one unit that aims to offer players a taste of what the system is all about. After a successful debut showing at Gamescom in Germany, the console is now doing the rounds at various retro events, so we caught up with David Oghia to talk a little more about the machine.

» Douglas Alves, author of *Electric Lines*, is a member of the French retro-gaming group M05.

We were surprised to learn that the whole project was born of a coincidence – David and the current Vectrex rights holder share the same hairdresser, and first met a decade ago. However, David only began to work on the Vectrex Mini project a few years ago when he became free of other commitments. "I met Eric, he's got a YouTube channel named Retro Relik's, and he made a Vectrex Mini for himself," says David "When I saw that, I contacted him and I said, 'Eric, you're the guy to create the prototype. You've already done one, so let's try to do another one, thinking what we need to do it industrially.'"

David is very clear about what the project is. "I've been asked many times, 'Why didn't you try to do the real-size one?' since it was already a mini arcade console," he tells us. "I'm not trying to recreate it because there is no vector screen any more, no way to have a CRT. I said, 'Let's not think about it in the way the original was intended.' It's an homage to the original one." Early publicity materials have stated that an AMOLED display will be used, but David tells us the decision isn't final. One thing that David is more certain on is that the console will use software emulation, despite fan requests for an FPGA-based system. "I said to them, 'FPGA is very expensive, it's going to cost close to $300 and it's not going to change a lot,'" David reveals. The software emulator will use the open source emulator VecX as a basis. "It works very well, it has some flaws, and I've got

> "You choose if you want to use the real overlays, or if you want to display overlays on the screen"
>
> DAVID OGHIA

» Classic adverts and more are featured in the Vectrex history book.

» The clock mode should make the Vectrex Mini a nice desk ornament when not being played.

» Here's a T-shirt design that shows off the all-in-one design of the classic console.

a guy I met in Germany that is going to help us debug the original emulator," he explains.

The aim is to include 12 games with the console. That seems like a small number in comparison to other such consoles, but there are only 28 official Vectrex releases to begin with. "As we are going to create the overlays, I think 12 is going to be expensive enough, because it's not only transparent stuff – it has to have a fifth colour [on the back] and a white colour to prevent the screen's light," David explains. "Of course, you can have the games with the overlays on the screen as it's a colour screen," he adds. "You choose if you want to use the real overlays, or if you want to display overlays on the screen." That will be useful, as the console also includes an SD card slot for loading homebrew games.

To ensure that the Vectrex Mini remains a functional desk ornament when it's not being played, the system will function as an alarm clock, and be able to connect to the internet to download local weather data. Additionally, the new mini controllers will be available with a Bluetooth dongle to connect to original Vectrex hardware. Beyond the Vectrex Mini and other hardware, David is planning something of a full Vectrex revival. T-shirt designs have been prepared, and the French videogame historian Douglas Alves is writing a Vectrex history book titled *Electric Lines*.

The Vectrex Mini campaign is due to go live on Kickstarter on 3 November, with consoles priced at €149 as standard – though limited early bird offers will be available, as will a short run of special edition consoles in white rather than the standard black. Finished consoles are expected to ship ten months after the end of the fundraising campaign. Original Vectrex units are becoming increasingly rare, expensive and fragile as time goes by – just ask Darran about the time his one caused a power cut in the office – so the Vectrex Mini could be a console that scratches an itch for players who can't justify diving into collecting for the real thing. Naturally, we'll follow the progress of the console and keep you updated in future issues.

» Who needs Sonic when the Vectrex has Spike for a hedgehog mascot?

BILLY HUDSON PASSES

On 18 September, retro-gaming YouTuber Billy Hudson passed away following a battle with cancer. Billy was known for co-hosting *The Game Chasers* with Jay Hatfield, a show in which they toured around the USA seeking retro-gaming treasures at flea markets, garage sales and other locations. The pair also had a spin-off show, *The Toy Chasers*, which used the same format for vintage toys. In his post announcing the sad news, Jay told fans, "Billy loves each and every one of you and appreciates the love and support you've given him."

Billy was a well-liked figure in the YouTube retro-gaming community, with fellow creators paying tribute on Twitter. Metal Jesus Rocks said, "Early in my YouTube career Billy helped me a lot behind the scenes with making videos, editing and other aspects of creating content," and Joe Redifer of the Game Sack channel said, "He probably wouldn't say as much about himself, but he was an incredibly creative, intelligent, and downright talented person." In a video, Pat Contri (AKA Pat The NES Punk) said that Billy, "Always tried to look on the brighter side."

Our thoughts are with Billy's family and friends at this sad time.

Who is Mike Mika?
Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

The Bat Man of Best Buy

There was a time, before online preorders, when a console launch felt like a holiday. You circled the date on the calendar, started saving up your money and cleared your schedule as if the whole thing was a proper vacation. And back then, scarcity wasn't much of a concern. As long as you had a retailer nearby and some patience, you had a fair shot. Then came the Flippers.

At first it was subtle, some guy buying three GameCubes for some reason. Annoying, yes, but manageable. Soon the lines grew longer and more mercenary. The air shifted. You weren't surrounded by passionate fans anymore, but by people who were competitive, cutthroat and uncaring, motivated by money. To stand a chance, you had to out-camp the profiteers.

By the time the Xbox 360 launch was imminent, my friends and I had adapted. We packed like survivalists: blankets, Game Boys and enough snacks to survive a nuclear winter. We were in the 40th position in a line at Best Buy that eventually swelled past 150 or so. Rumour said they had 50 consoles, which left us nervous. Every time a blue-shirted employee wandered past, we pounced for intel. The only response was a shrug – proof in my mind that a secret stash was already spoken for. If we were going to walk away with a console, it'd be by fortune's grace.

In front of us sat a towering, tattooed man hunched over a battered ThinkPad and hammering out a paper due the next morning. In our hours together, we learned that he was the first in his family to go to college. We were starting to really like the guy – until we asked which games he was excited for. He admitted he wasn't there for games at all. He was going to flip his console. My heart sank. A Flipper. One of them!

But his reason was harder to dismiss: he was trying to cover another semester's tuition. It complicated the neat little moral lines I'd drawn. I didn't want him to walk away with the last system, but I couldn't quite bring myself to despise him, either.

> "If we were going to walk away with a console, it'd be by fortune's grace"

As midnight neared, tempers flared. Word spread that a man had tried to cut to the front, claiming he'd saved a spot earlier in the day. Shouting broke out, but no 'blue shirt' stepped in. The line was breaking down, consoles were seemingly vanishing in front of us, and I faced a nightmare scenario: going home with a game I didn't want and a cheap Mad Catz controller without a console to use them on.

That's when our student neighbour calmly closed his laptop, asked us to keep an eye on it, and walked to his car. From the trunk, he produced an Old Hickory wooden baseball bat.

Without fanfare – like this was simply part of the console-launch liturgy – he disappeared around the corner toward the front of the line. The shouting intensified, then stopped. Minutes later, the would-be line-cutter emerged, chastened and escorted to the back of the line by our new friend. The bat was returned to the trunk. The ThinkPad reopened. Typing resumed. We just sat in silence and awe.

When the doors finally opened, I got my console… barely. And I left with a new perspective. Flippers weren't always heartless profiteers; sometimes they were broke students trying to stay in school. And sometimes, if you were very lucky, they kept the line honest with an Old Hickory bat. His name escapes me – if he ever told us at all – but that night he was the hero the launch needed, not the one we wanted. He was our Bat Man.

Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

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» Could SNK's experience show the kinds of cross-promotion we can expect from EA in the future?

» [Switch 2] Massive money-spinners like the *EA Sports FC* must be at the heart of this deal.

YOU CAN'T SPELL DEAL WITHOUT EA

THE GIANT PUBLISHER HAS BEEN ACQUIRED FOR $55 BILLION

After 35 years of being a publicly traded company, Electronic Arts is to go private in one of the biggest acquisitions in videogame history. Three major investors are involved – the Saudi Arabian sovereign wealth fund, the investment company Affinity Partners, headed by US president Donald Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and Silver Lake, a private equity company.

EA was founded in 1982 and first listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange in 1990. It hasn't always been a beloved company – it was named "Worst Company In America" by *Consumerist* voters in 2012 and 2013 – but it sits upon a treasure trove of classic games, from early hits like *MULE*, the *Desert Strike* series and *Road Rash* to *The Sims*, *Medal Of Honor* and *Burnout*, as well as more modern hits like the *Mass Effect* and *Dead Space* series. The company is also the custodian of several other significant gaming brands, thanks to years of acquisitions. Among them are *Ultima*, *Command & Conquer*, Bullfrog's games including *Populous*, *Theme Park* and *Dungeon Keeper*, and PopCap's casual hits such as *Bejeweled*. Thanks to its 2021 acquisition of Codemasters, EA owns the rights to the *Dizzy* series and other 8-bit hits, as well as Sensible Software's back catalogue including *Wizball*, *Sensible Soccer* and *Cannon Fodder*.

The move fits in with the Saudi Arabian government's recent investments in videogames, as it currently owns SNK and mobile publisher Scopely, and has minority stakes in Take Two, Nintendo and Capcom. This fits into a wider strategy of investment in sports and entertainment, as the country seeks to diversify its income to reduce its reliance on oil wealth. While there's no indication that any direct involvement in EA's games will come in the immediate future, SNK's *Fatal Fury: City Of The Wolves* shows what may lie ahead. The game included guest characters Cristiano Ronaldo and Salvatore Ganacci, celebrities favoured by the Saudi Arabian government, and they were central to its massive marketing push – but the game flopped, leading to the resignation of SNK's CEO Kenji Matsubara in May. We certainly wouldn't be surprised to see a big focus on the Saudi Pro League in the *FIFA* successor series *EA Sports FC* in the not too distant future.

The EA deal is worth $55 billion, and financial publication Bloomberg reports that JP Morgan Chase & Co's $20 billion financing is "the largest debt commitment ever by a single bank for such a deal". That debt falls on the company itself to repay. EA is currently earning well, with its net profit of $2 billion in the 2025 financial year making it obvious why investors would be interested, but the debt may prove challenging to pay off depending on the interest rates. ✱

» [ZX Spectrum] EA is sitting on a huge chunk of UK gaming history, thanks to its ownership of Codemasters.

» [3DO] What will happen to classic franchises like *Road Rash* under the new ownership?

LAST NINJA DELAYED

System 3 has delayed its *The Last Ninja Collection* on consoles, based on imagery found in the original games. The company claims that, "Nintendo has made serious objections to the original Rising Sun flag artwork in *Last Ninja 3*," a flag that is controversial due to its use by the Japanese military during World War II. The company aims to secure a waiver or omit the Amiga version.

EGM DOCUMENTARY

Joe Redifer of the YouTube channel Game Sack has announced that he's directing and editing a documentary on the history of the long-running American videogame magazine *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. The film is being created in partnership with My Life In Gaming. There is no release date set, but Joe has confirmed there will be no fundraising campaign.

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine

Misery guts

We are a silly old bunch, aren't we? Us retro gaming enthusiasts. Getting upset at so many things that don't matter in the slightest. A little of that playground rivalry can be fun, but only if it isn't taken too seriously. If we mean it, it stops being enjoyable and becomes rather nasty.

I've had a couple of people online call me out for jumping on the retro bandwagon. Doing podcasts, shows, this column – simply to garner an audience and to make money. And while it is true I am paid £1,500 per **RG** piece I submit, I'm not exactly coining it in. I don't think anyone on the scene is. And trust me, I ain't doing this for fame! Although saying that, I do get a warm glow when people at said events come up to me and ask if I am Richard Bacon.

The latest thing that seems to have got some of you vexed is the announcement of a Vectrex Mini. When I first read this I did wonder if this was some crowdfunding vapourware-type thing that DJ Slopes is always wanging on about. But no, it looks legit (don't they all?) and people have played it and had a marvellous time. Again, it has been smoke and mirrors in the past – Coleco Chameleon anybody?

I firmly believe this one is legit and it's going to be £149 (it's Euros actually but I don't know how to do that symbol. Or the copyright one) count me in!

Here's where some people get sniffy. A few voices online complained that it has a LED screen and is not a CRT TV and therefore it couldn't authentically capture the vector graphics that made the machine so blah-blah-blah. Of course it won't have a CRT! Those things aren't getting made anymore baby. They're gone, except for the ones on Facebook Marketplace, and they smell of nicotine-infused homes.

Some people actually got very angry about the Vectrex Mini project (I should at this point say I am not sponsored by them BUT. If they want a chat…) Angry? Really? Because someone has come up with a concept, built it, shown it working and is going to sell it? I suspect they won't be getting rich on it, and even if they do – good luck to them!

Surely anything that allows people to play those old games is good? I mentioned before that I sold my Vectrex for about £250 to put it towards a holiday for me and my kids. The original hardware is way too expensive for most people. And while the OG is beautiful, a work of art, it takes up a lot of space.

Everyone who complained publicly on social media and forums – I've got some good news. I just checked and it is NOT compulsory to buy one! Isn't that amazing! So now you don't have to get one, stop gatekeeping and let others enjoy what looks like an absolutely ace machine.

Can we get a Dreamcast Mini next please? *

> "Surely anything that allows people to play those old games is good?"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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RIVEN CROWN

Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

A link to the past

Retro games aren't just old games. I mean, obviously. Duh. They're nostalgia – a gateway to simpler, more innocent times. Yadda yadda. The term 'retro gaming' has come to mean playing and collecting old games.

But! I've started to wonder whether retro games might have become a genre in and of themselves, and that perhaps we've been using completely the wrong terminology. I shall explain.

Do you remember Britpop? Of course you do. You're old, like I am. I might not have had THAT haircut or worn a bucket hat, but I did grow my sideburns and buy a pair of John Lennon shades.

During those halcyon Britpop years, when British guitar music ruled the charts, Digitiser was at its peak. I hesitate to say we were part of the so-called Cool Britannia, but through Digi I did once share a cab with the bloke from Jesus Jones, go backstage at a Blur gig and see Oasis play Maine Road. It's odd to look back now and recall seeing the national flag everywhere, given how weirdly divisive it has since become.

Anyway, I'm not here to talk politics. I mention this because the whole Britpop thing was about embracing the past. In popular music, the Eighties had been all about new technology – computers and software were used with increasing frequency – but in the mid-Nineties, bands returned to a more analogue sound. They were influenced by the music of the Sixties and Seventies – some more overtly (hello, Oasis), others with a little more subtlety (Suede, Blur et al). Even though each of these bands had their own sound and identity, they were all lumped together as Britpop.

Pretty much every other indie game you might care to mention borrows from the past in a similar way. Retro-style games are a big thing. Yes, in part that's because they're easier and cheaper to make than a multi-billion-dollar sandbox adventure like *Assassin's Creed* or *GTA*, but they're also a homage, channelling the influences of creators raised on 2D platformers, isometric puzzle games, and point-and-click adventures.

Often they push beyond the boundaries of what their inspirations could achieve – using modern technology to do new things while retaining the ethos and aesthetic. Some remix the nostalgia into strange and trippy or nightmarish forms. In essence, it's exactly what Britpop did.

So, does this make retro-style games a genre in and of themselves? Or do you still break them down into beat-'em-up, shoot-'em-up, platformer, etc? And if we start calling retro-style games 'retro games', what happens to the actual retro games – the original ones? It's strange how we don't call music from the Sixties and Seventies 'retro music' – it's just music. There's no magazine called Retro Pop. Yes, there's a *Classic Rock* magazine, so perhaps 'Classic Games' is a more appropriate term than 'retro'?

It probably doesn't matter. And I'm not here to advocate for a name change for the esteemed publication you're holding in your hands, but it's curious when you consider that the word 'retro' means 'imitative of a style or fashion from the recent past'. *

> "Pretty much every other indie game you might care to mention borrows from the past in a similar way"

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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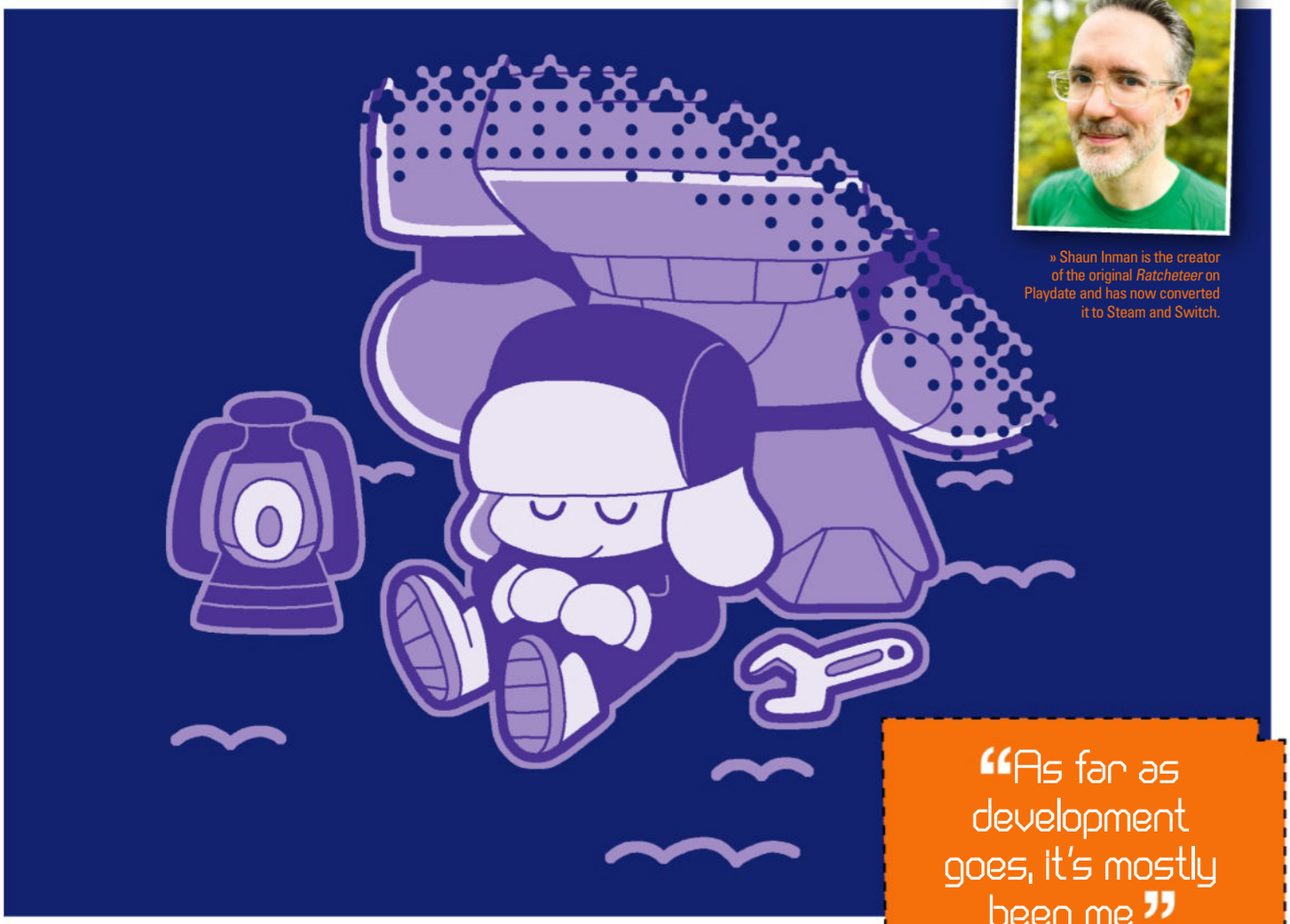


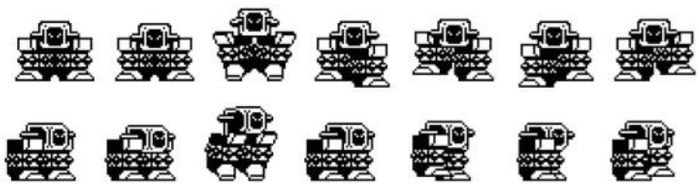
» Shaun Inman is the creator of the original *Ratcheteer* on Playdate and has now converted it to Steam and Switch.

Ratcheteer DX

Shaun Inman on converting a Playdate hit to Steam

The original *Ratcheteer* was a charming spin on the 2D *Legend Of Zelda* titles and originally launched on Panic's Playdate console. Now, its original developer Shaun Inman has decided to port the game to Steam and Switch. Here's how it all came about.

So Shaun, when did you first come up with the Playdate idea for *Racheteer*?
Panic approached me about their secret little handheld that they were working on. It had been about maybe a year since Retro Game Crunch where me and a couple friends made six retro-inspired games and the goal was six months, but it took a year because life, and I was trying to figure out what I was going to do next. They presented Playdate to me, which had a d-pad, two buttons and a crank. And I was like, "This!" I love constraints.



» Here's a sprite sheet of one of the game's bosses.

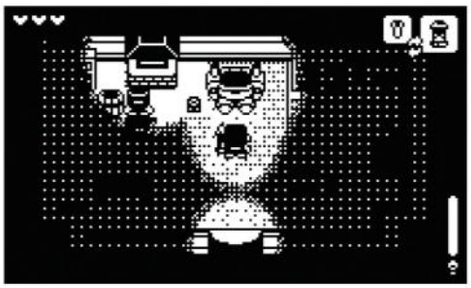
How long did the original version take to create and what issues did you face while making it?
I want to say the core gameplay stuff probably took about three months. Just getting the game field down and programming all the different abilities and figuring out how it was all going to work within the constraints of the system. But then I started out doing it in the Lua runtime which is how most Playdate games are made and I was running up against performance issues on the actual hardware because it's got a very modest processor. So I started looking into porting it to C. And so that was a whole thing, as I'd never really made a project in C before and it was a bit of a learning curve.

What classic games have inspired *Ratcheteer*?
Link's Awakening was a big inspiration. I mean, maybe even to this date, it's my favourite 2D *Zelda* game. I like it more than *A Link To The Past*.

So why convert *Ratcheteer* to Steam and Switch?
It was really well received on the Playdate. It was awarded Game Of The Year for the first Playdate community awards, and [I liked]

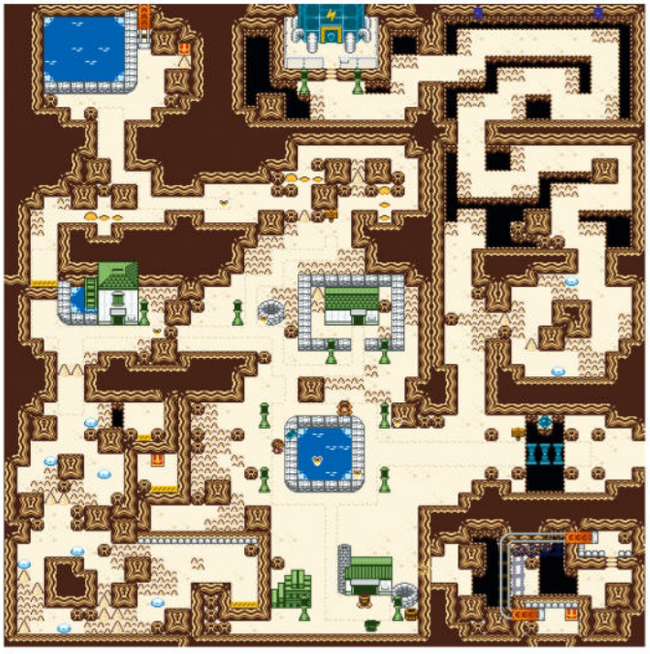
> "As far as development goes, it's mostly been me"
> **SHAUN INMAN**

» [Playdate] The Playdate's crank was originally used in *Ratcheteer* to activate certain weapons and manage your lamp's light.



» [PlayDate] Here's the original *Ratcheteer* showing how light works in the game…

» [PC] … and here's how lighting works with the new colour palette.



» [PC] Here's a detailed map overview, showing off Mechanic Town.

» [PC] Here's an overview of the caverns you'll be able to explore in *Ratcheteer DX*.

» [PC] Like any good adventure, *Ratcheteer DX* has plenty of interesting NPCs to meet.

» Here's a rough sketch of the *Ratcheteer DX* artwork. The final piece is on page 14.

the idea of reaching a larger audience and seeing how it does with general retro-gaming fans.

What has it been like to convert?
The porting process was relatively easy. Because I originally ported it to C after being started in Lua, I ended up just using SDL2. The hardest, most time-consuming part was colourising all the graphics and everything because when I created the initial sprites, it was more about less line art and more three-dimensional sculpting with light. So now it was about going in and adding little shades and stuff to sort of, make it a little bit more volumetric.

Tell us about the transition from black and white to colour.
One of the unique things about the original game was that a lot of it takes place in the dark and you have a lantern. When I was designing that in black and white, it was sort of easy to think about because you've got light and dark and then something shines a light and then everything becomes much lighter and you're just dealing with those two colours. When working with colour I had to figure out a way to balance the colour of the darkness with the things that are sort of hidden in it and how that comes through. It ended up transitioning pretty well from the Playdate.

The new version reminds us of a Game Boy Color game. Why is that?
I never had a Game Boy Color growing up, but there's something about that art style where you've got kind of the constraints of the NES as far as palettes go, but then you have that many more years of experience of people working within those constraints.

How long has this new version taken to make?
It's probably because I haven't been working on it full time, but it's been about a year-and-a-half now. I think the core work was probably about six months getting all the assets redone and getting it working on Steam and Steam Deck, Mac OS, Windows and Switch.

Have you added any new extras to the game?
I did add a new ration system. So, in *Zelda* games, you can collect fairies and then when you die, they refill your hearts. So, after you complete an area in the game, you can talk to some of the kids and they'll sell you their rations or their extra vegetables because they don't like them. So if you fall in battle, then it'll just refill you there. That was the big quality-of-life thing that was added.

Has *Ratcheteer DX* been a solo endeavour for you?
As far as development goes, it's mostly been me, but there's making the game and then there's making the product. We've localised it into ten languages thanks to Local Heroes, there's also QA testing. The original credits were me, the guy who did all the sounds, Matthew Grim, and then a person who did illustrations, Charlie Davis. Now it's a scroll of everybody else who has come together to push this out the door. It's now more than quadruple the number of people.

If you like the look of *Ratcheteer DX*, you'll find a code to download a secret free demo on page 2.

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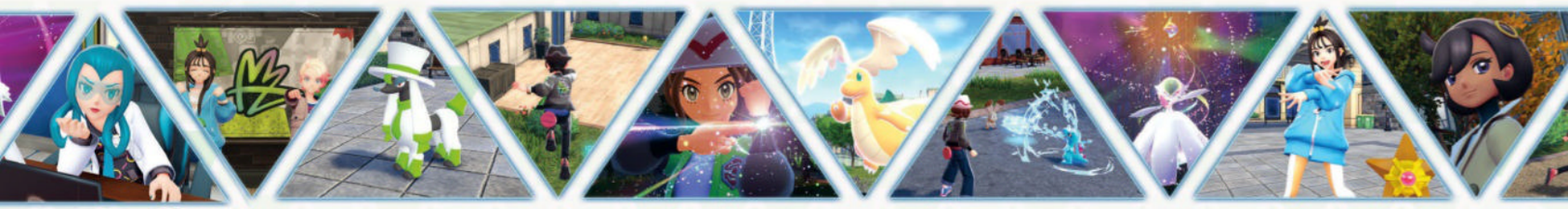

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BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

» [PlayStation 3] Sadly, the English version of *Yakuza 3* would suffer some major content cuts.

MAY 2009 – A lack of hot releases suggests that the summer slump has started early this year, but Wii owners have a crowning moment and the other notable games are criminally good. Nick Thorpe returns to the past once more, and wants to stay

NEWS MAY 2009

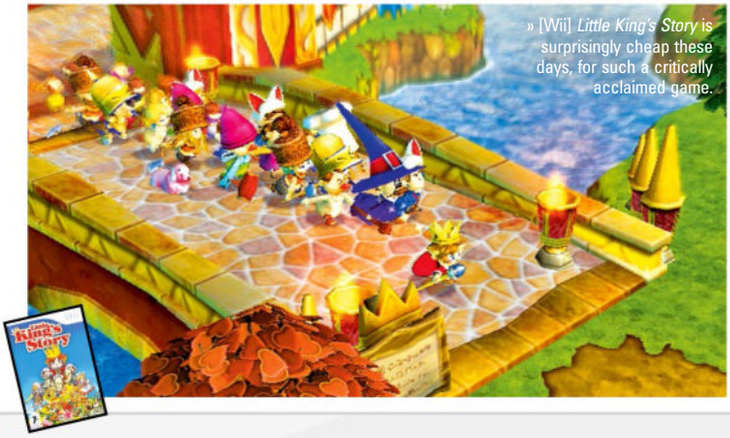
On 8 May, the *Daily Telegraph* obtained a full copy of MPs' expenses claims. The newspaper published them uncensored, and within a week various MPs were suspended or announced their intention to retire from parliament at the next election. The leader of the opposition, the Conservatives' David Cameron, announces that he will repay a claim of £680 on his constituency home.

The Eurovision Song Contest finals were held on 16 May in Moscow, Russia. The competition featured a number of differences from previous years – national jury votes were now factored into results alongside telephone voting, and Graham Norton took over from Terry Wogan as the UK's host for the BBC. Norway's Alexander Rybak won the competition with the song *Fairytale*, earning the most points from both the juries and the voting public.

In football, Manchester United secured a third consecutive Premier League trophy on 16 May, with a 0-0 draw against Arsenal. With this triumph, the club equalled Liverpool's record of 18 top flight trophies. On 30 May, Chelsea beat Everton 2-1 in the FA Cup final, with Frank Lampard scoring the winning goal. This marked Chelsea's fifth time lifting the cup.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MAY 2009

Real-time strategy isn't the genre you'd necessarily associate most closely with the Wii, but the *Pikmin*-alike *Little King's Story* delighted reviewers this month. *Official Nintendo Magazine* gave the game 92%, saying, "From its simple, approachable beginnings, *Little King's Story* builds and builds, adding ever more complex elements. It's perfectly paced – you're always on the verge of feeling overwhelmed by everything that's going on but just as you're about to panic, a new element is introduced that pulls everything together." Similarly impressed, *games™* gave it 8/10 and called it "an achingly cute real-time strategy game that's as well made and as funny as *Pikmin*". *Edge* gave it 9/10, saying that it was "as rich as it is long, and it's a very lengthy game indeed". With *NGamer*'s 92% exclusive review last month, that's unanimous praise.



» [Wii] *Little King's Story* is surprisingly cheap these days, for such a critically acclaimed game.

Rockstar's *Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars* brought motorised mayhem to the DS, and critics appreciated the criminality. "That Rockstar has unleashed its most delinquent, incendiary *GTA* on DS is a bold salute of the two-fingered variety," said *Edge*, in a 9/10 review. "With the sum of your wealth converted into white-hot bags of smack, driving in Liberty takes on a whole new dimension. Clip a cop's wing mirror and it may as well sound across the entire city, blowing the whistle on the getaway of a lifetime." In an 8/10 review, *games™* said, "*GTA* games are renowned for starting out slow, but *Chinatown Wars* really comes out fighting. That the first hour holds some genuinely interesting missions is an unexpected treat indeed." Add that to 94% scores from both *Official Nintendo Magazine* and *NGamer* last month, and it's undoubtedly a real handheld hit.

There wasn't much to shout about on the Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 in the UK this month,

but more criminal capers were on offer for PS3 owners who fancied importing *Yakuza 3*. This time around, Kiryu has relocated to Okinawa to run an orphanage, but he's dragged back to the underworld before long. "It's a game that is bursting with as much ingenuity as it is eccentricity," said *Official PlayStation Magazine* in an 8/10 review. It described the new chase battles as "terrible" but claimed "it's easy to forget this while you're taking part in an honest-to-goodness game of hide 'n' seek with some kids". *Play*'s review praised the use of weapons, saying, "It's a silly sort of violence, almost slapstick, and it definitely makes the fighting more fun than in some other brawlers." That was good for an 82% score.

On the PC, renowned casual game studio PopCap Games brought an oddball spin to the tower defence strategy genre with *Plants Vs Zombies*. *PC Gamer* said, "There's nothing casual about the 30 goddamn hours I've spent, effectively, *gardening*," and gave it 90%, noting that, "By the time you finish the Adventure, the obscene wealth of other things to do already outweighs it for entertainment value." *Edge* also called it "a game as robust and honed as any the king of casual has made, built from a simple idea spun out to the furthest extents that can be safely imagined" and gave it 9/10, concluding, "In feeding constant surprise, engaging wit and sharply pitched challenge during its course, *Plants Vs Zombies* proves again PopCap's incredible knack of taking an established game form and making it all its own."

In a relatively sparse month for current releases, it's safe to look to the future – and *BioShock 2* was clearly the game on everyone's minds, earning the front cover on *Official Xbox 360 Magazine*, *Official PlayStation Magazine*, *games™* and *PC Gamer*. Developed by 2K Marin, the game reprised the failed underwater utopia of Rapture as a setting, but cast you as a hulking Big Daddy rather than a stranded stranger. "One thing you can't escape is the wrath of the Big Sister," said *OXM*. "As new overlord of the city, she likes things just the way they are, and as you separate Little Sisters from their Big Daddies she'll start to take notice." *OPM* stated that "our biggest wish would be a co-op game built around a team of proto-Splicers fighting to escape during Rapture's early collapse into war". Players would have to wait nine months to find out how close the magazine was.

Will June have more quality games to offer? Join us again next issue to find out.

» [PC] PopCap tried to make zombies cute. This is pro-shambler propaganda and we won't tolerate it.

» [DS] Long gone were the days of Nintendo consoles being the home of safe, sanitised games.

» [Xbox 360] Nick has four little sisters, and hasn't sacrificed any of them. BioShock would reward that behaviour.

CHARTS

MAY 2009

XBOX 360

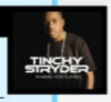
1 – **Resident Evil 5** (Capcom)
2 – **Halo Wars** (Microsoft)
3 – **Street Fighter IV** (Capcom)
4 – **Call Of Duty: World At War** (Activision)
5 – **Sega Mega Drive Collection** (Sega)

PLAYSTATION 3

1 – **Resident Evil 5** (Capcom)
2 – **Killzone 2** (Sony)
3 – **Tom Clancy's HAWX** (Ubisoft)
4 – **Street Fighter IV** (Capcom)
5 – **Call Of Duty: World At War** (Activision)

PC

1 – **Empire: Total War** (Sega)
2 – **Football Manager 2009** (Sega)
3 – **Warhammer 40,000: Dawn Of War II** (THQ)
4 – **World Of Warcraft: Wrath Of The Lich King** (Activision)
5 – **The Sims 2: Double Deluxe** (EA)



MUSIC

1 – **Number 1** (Tinchy Stryder feat. N-Dubz)
2 – **In For The Kill** (La Roux)
3 – **Tiny Dancer (Hold Me Closer)** (Ironik feat. Chipmunk & Elton John)
4 – **I'm Not Alone** (Calvin Harris)
5 – **Poker Face** (Lady Gaga)

THIS MONTH IN...

Official PlayStation Magazine

Was *OPM* wrong to give *Saints Row 2* 5/10? Nathan Ditum says no, calling it "cheap, exploitative, and desperate to sell itself to sniggering idiots" and "the idiot child of everything that's wrong and backwards with the medium".

Official Xbox 360 Magazine

"Since it filed for bankruptcy at the end of February, more Midway licences have been up for grabs. […] The Chicago-based publisher is now trying to sell off its longest-running franchise, *Mortal Kombat*, to potential buyers."

games™

"I still believe that if you're an experienced reviewer you can tell almost immediately whether or not a game is any good," says Julian Rignall. "Fun is something you can get a feel for the second you start playing." We've got to agree, especially when you've played as many games as us.

Atlantis

SO THAT'S WHY ATLANTIS SUNK

» ATARI 2600 » 1982 » IMAGIC

As much as I liked *Missile Command* in the arcades, its trackball-based controls weren't really suited to home systems.

While there's no denying that Rob Fulop's take on the popular arcade game worked surprisingly well on the Atari 2600, its lack of pace was something that really bothered me.

There's no such problems with *Atlantis*, as Dennis Koble's fast-paced game is zippy, frantic and exhilarating to play, and because it's built with the Atari 2600 in mind, it has a delightful straightforward control system that adds to its accessibility.

Whereas *Missile Command* on Atari's console utilises a slow-moving cursor, which directs the groundfire of your bases, *Atlantis* simply assigns control directly to your three ground-based guns. So a simple press of the fire button causes your central turret to fire directly upwards, while pressing the fire button while holding left or right will fire the guns positioned on either side of the screen.

Invading alien aircraft appear from both sides of the screen at various speeds and heights and you'll need to use the correct gun to take them down as quickly as possible. Dally for too long and a fighter will zip across the screen with a laser beam that obliterates one of your bases – once all your bases are destroyed the game is over.

While *Atlantis* is mechanically very simple its frantic pace and nippy action means there's very little time to feel bored. The scoring is solid too, with more points being awarded for the faster ships and a lost base being replaced every time you amass 10,000 points. There's nothing more satisfying than precariously being on the edge of disaster and then slowly turning things around with some well-aimed shots that eventually allow you to restore your defences and stay in the fight.

Atlantis may not be the flashiest-looking of games, but its overall slickness and tense atmosphere makes for a chaotically fun experience. I've no idea where its rights currently lay, but I'd love to see it return in some capacity.

THE EVOLUTION OF BANJO-KAZOOIE

THE FINAL ITERATION OF RARE'S PROJECT DREAM, BANJO-KAZOOIE BECAME A BEST-SELLER THAT RECEIVED MULTIPLE FOLLOW-UPS. BANJO CREATORS CHRIS SUTHERLAND, ED BRYAN, GAVIN HOOD, GARY RICHARDS AND STEVE MALPASS EXPLAIN HOW THE SERIES EVOLVED

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

» [Nintendo 64] It may look nothing like it, but the Rare project *Dream* ultimately evolved into *Banjo-Kazooie*.

» [Nintendo 64] The benefit of controlling two characters in *Banjo-Kazooie* is that each one learns different moves.

» [Nintendo 64] With the aid of red feathers, the titular heroes of *Banjo-Kazooie* can soar to new heights.

During Rare's Nintendo days, the studio made a habit of producing cutting-edge games on aging hardware. In late-1994, its pre-rendered platformer *Donkey Kong Country* allowed the sprite-focussed SNES to compete with the polygon-powered PlayStation, however a contemporary project codenamed *Project Dream* was struggling to find form. It too employed pre-rendered visuals, but was isometric rather than side-on. *Dream* was an action adventure featuring pirates that was intended to be vast in scale, and it was pushing the SNES even further than *Donkey Kong Country*. Character designer Ed Bryan joined the *Dream* team after cutting his teeth at Rare on a coin-op brawler. "I was in the *Killer Instinct* stable for a little while, after that I moved to a project in the *Donkey Kong* barn that was called *Dream*," Ed recalls. "We were working on the Super NES, but we were using all of this rendered stuff in PowerAnimator on these Silicon Graphics machines. We were trying to make some huge *Zelda*-like game in 3D with pirates."

Sometime after Ed started working on the project, it was moved to the N64. Then shortly after finishing *Donkey Kong Country 2*, coder Chris Sutherland joined Ed on *Dream*. Chris reflects on some major changes as it went from one iteration to another. "The main character was a boy called Edison, but then it got changed to a bear," Chris recollects. "There was a top-down 3D environment where you were chased by Trolls, then we looked at doing something more like *Donkey Kong Country* but in 3D, and after that we went more to a fixed side-on camera. We were then shown what the *Conker* team was doing. It had managed to get very high-quality polygonal backgrounds, and so we took that approach as well. That was when we started *Banjo-Kazooie*, as it was to become later on."

The name *Banjo-Kazooie* came from its two player characters: Banjo; the aforementioned bear, and Kazooie; a colourful bird. Not only did Kazooie's introduction make sense of an otherwise nonsensical concept, but it also allowed for two contrasting movesets. "We felt there should be a *reason* for the double-jump, and someone said there could be these wings that came out of Banjo's backpack that could flap," Chris explains. "Then the extension to that was why not just have another character that had wings? That was where Kazooie came out of. We could then use her for other moves, like legs that came out the bottom of the backpack and run. It gave us more opportunities for variety. Otherwise we were limited by the fact that, for example, Banjo could only go at a certain speed."

The *Banjo-Kazooie* team had some moves in mind that didn't necessarily suit their heroes, and in any case these might spoil the

"WE FELT THERE SHOULD BE A REASON FOR THE DOUBLE-JUMP, AND SOMEONE SAID THERE COULD BE THESE WINGS THAT CAME OUT OF BANJO'S BACKPACK THAT COULD FLAP"

CHRIS SUTHERLAND

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: THE STOP 'N' SWOP SAGA

CHRIS SUTHERLAND RECALLS BANJO'S UNUSED N64 TECH TRICK

■ "The way that Stop 'N' Swop came about was that Paul Machacek, who worked on *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Tooie*, noticed that when you turned the power supply to the N64 off and on quickly the contents of the RAM were preserved. So the things you had written to the memory were still there. He thought that since that was the case, if he switched off the N64, took out one game, put in another game and switched it back on – and then instead of clearing the memory, if he checked the same location in RAM, then he could find information from the previous game. So he devised a technique where there was this particular place in memory where he could write information from *Banjo-Kazooie* detailing the things you had collected and then when *Banjo-Tooie* started up it would find these flags set in RAM that meant you had done certain things in the first game. Then based on that it would unlock certain things in the second game. So Paul explained it to Tim Stamper, and they were excited about doing that. I think at the time they knew Nintendo wouldn't think it was that good an idea, so they tried to get to the point where it was pretty much all working and then told Nintendo about it. Nintendo then told them that they couldn't do it because it was too risky. I suppose nobody at Rare wanted to say what Stop 'N' Swop was after that because nobody wanted to upset Nintendo."

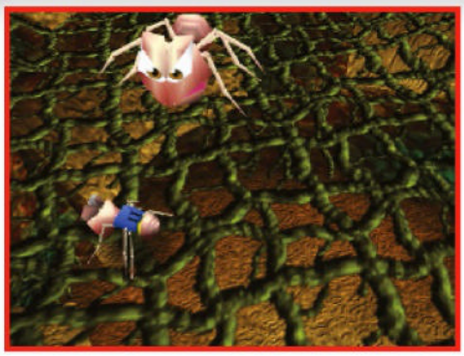
INTERVIEWEES

CHRIS SUTHERLAND
■ *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Tooie* coder Chris Sutherland is now a member of the Playtonic Games team.

ED BRYAN
■ Also now at Playtonic, Ed Bryan designed characters for *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Tooie* and *Nuts & Bolts*.

GARY RICHARDS
■ The designer of *Banjo-Pilot*, Gary Richards is another of the talented crew at Playtonic Games.

STEVE MALPASS
■ After doing QA for *Banjo-Kazooie*, Steve Malpass was a designer on *Tooie* and *Nuts & Bolts*.



» [Nintendo 64] As *Banjo-Kazooie*'s transformations go, Banjo's termite form is one of the least glamorous.

game's challenge. Their solution was to limit these abilities to areas that Banjo could only tackle while in another form. "We didn't want you to be able to use those moves in the rest of the game because it would break everything, so we limited them by changing what the character was," Chris reasons. "The problem was that when you went back to some areas they became a lot easier or it made it a lot more complicated in terms of design. Playing as a different character was also a much more fun experience. I mean, Mario has his different suits that he wears, and in the case of Banjo he transformed into a washing machine, or whatever it was."

The fact that *Banjo-Kazooie* sold millions on release reflected how well players responded to the game's two heroes, their moves and Banjo's transformations. Character designer Ed Bryan remembers being excited to start work on a sequel. "We were absolutely buzzing because *Banjo-Kazooie* had been a huge success, so we were thinking that we should just get on and make the next one," Ed enthuses. "I think we were more relaxed about *Banjo-Tooie*, because of course we knew how to do it, whereas with the first one we felt like we were making it up as we went along."

> "WE WERE ABSOLUTELY BUZZING BECAUSE BANJO-KAZOOIE HAD BEEN A HUGE SUCCESS, SO WE WERE THINKING THAT WE SHOULD JUST GET ON AND MAKE THE NEXT ONE"
>
> **ED BRYAN**

There was still a certain amount of making things up for *Banjo-Tooie*, however, in that it had new features like solo missions for its two protagonists and FPS sections inspired by an earlier Rare title, as *Banjo* coder Chris Sutherland notes. "There were four or five of us on the *Banjo* team that would play *GoldenEye*, probably every lunchtime for a couple of years, so that was a strong influence on *Banjo-Tooie*," Chris reminisces. "Then I think Gregg Mayles always wanted to have Banjo and Kazooie separate and then join up. It just felt like the next logical step. Once we split the characters apart suddenly your moveset was reduced, so you couldn't do all the things you could do before. It was another way to give you a different set of moves. Then there were missions built around that."

A fresh approach was also taken with how the protagonists of *Banjo-Tooie* learned new abilities. They attained these periodically, like in the original, but only after a set number of

» [Nintendo 64] This *Banjo-Kazooie* puzzle involves giving a hard won orange to a cute little chimp.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: CRAZY CHRONOLOGY

GAVIN HOOD ON WHY GRUNTY'S REVENGE WAS ITS PREDECESSOR'S PREQUEL

"The only restriction we had was that in an ideal world the story for *Grunty's Revenge* had to tie into the N64 games but not affect them in any way, which was why it was set in between the first game and the second one. That was why Grunty was freed from the rock in *Grunty's Revenge* but ends up back under it. It was so that it didn't really change any of the canon. That was one of the main stipulations. I don't know if that came from Rare or from our team, but we wanted to tie *Grunty's Revenge* into the N64 games as much as possible. We didn't want it to feel like some random side project. We wanted people who played it to realise that it tied in with the earlier *Banjo* games. At the time we were making it there was a lot of conversations at Rare where we said that if it was going to be a part of the *Banjo* storyline then we couldn't do things that didn't make sense of how the other games worked. So we had to be quite clever in how we structured the start, the middle and the end so that while it affected the broader world it didn't actually have any impact on it at all. So everything that happened in *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Banjo-Tooie* would have happened even if the events of *Grunty's Revenge* didn't take place, but they did, and we made that all work out."

» [Nintendo 64] Lunchtime *GoldenEye* sessions at Rare inspired the FPS sections that are found in *Banjo-Tooie*.

musical notes had been collected. Chris puts this down to pacing. "It allowed us to gate certain things, so that when the player had a certain number of notes then they must have done certain things, rather than them just rushing through and getting a new move too soon. So it was forcing the player to do more and complete more of the game before they could proceed. It was probably also the fact that it meant you couldn't shortcut the game if you knew exactly where to go; it meant you had to have a more thorough exploration."

One other novel area of *Banjo-Tooie* was its multiplayer mode. It lacked the adventure of the solo offering, but while Chris considers the N64 ideal for multiplayer he feels it made sense that *Banjo-Tooie*'s implementation focussed on minigames. "The N64 having four controllers was a move by Nintendo to say that the N64 was for multiple players, so *Banjo-Tooie*'s multiplayer could have been to do with that," Chris reckons. "We could have made its minigames less disjointed with cutscenes, but I think it would have been quite challenging to make an *adventure* for the multiplayer because we would have had to design it so that multiple players could play it. If there was a split-screen challenge then it would have been difficult to not have the adventure split-screen too, meaning that the camera would have to pan out quite far."

» [Nintendo 64] There are numerous changes in *Banjo-Tooie*, including Mumbo Jumbo as a new playable character.

» [Nintendo 64] The Jiggywiggy challenges in *Banjo-Tooie* involve making jigsaws against the clock.

» [Nintendo 64] In *Banjo-Tooie* you can split its two heroes up and take them out on solo missions.

» [Game Boy Advance] Despite its 2D visuals, verticality plays a big part in the levels designed for *Grunty's Revenge*.

» [Game Boy Advance] The fun minigames in *Grunty's Revenge* include one where you effectively fish for sheep!

» [Game Boy Advance] *Grunty's Revenge* has third-person shooter sections similar to some *Banjo-Tooie* FPS challenges.

» [Java] *Grunty's Revenge Mobile* is a stripped-back version of the GBA game's adventure.

Although *Banjo-Tooie* was well received when it came out, its development team, led by *Banjo-Kazooie* designer Gregg Mayles, decided against making a follow-up. This task instead fell to Rare's handheld team, which included designer Gavin Hood. "We wanted to get the feeling of a 3D game in a 2D game, but it was quite tricky," Gavin concedes. "We started with something similar to a *Zelda*-style *Conker* game that came out on the Game Boy Color, but we couldn't really do the kind of platforming we wanted. So our lead programmer put a 3D collision mesh inside a 2D engine. Then we used the GBA's layers system to decide what the player went in front of or behind. That was how we managed to get a feeling of height and depth, and jumping across to things."

> "STARTING WITHOUT KAZOOIE WAS MAINLY A STORY CONCEIT. IT WAS TO MAKE GRUNTY'S REVENGE FEEL DIFFERENT, AND ALSO TO MAKE USE OF THE PACK WHACK"
>
> **GAVIN HOOD**

Having achieved pseudo-3D collision detection for their 2D GBA *Banjo* title – *Grunty's Revenge,* the team working on the sequel next borrowed a trick from *Donkey Kong Country* to give their follow-up pre-rendered polygon-based sprites and slick animation. "The big conversation after we had the collision in place was about how we would represent Banjo and the enemies, because we wanted them to feel quite fluid," Gavin says. "There was a lot of work involved in doing that. We did really high-res renders of all of the characters and rendered them out into different frames of animation to get them as smooth and natural as we could in comparison to the 3D *Banjo* games."

In terms of gameplay, *Grunty's Revenge* was an adventure-based platformer like its N64 counterparts, but it had points of difference. Most noticeably, it began with Kazooie getting kidnapped, leaving Banjo on a solo rescue mission for the first few levels. "Starting without Kazooie was mainly a story conceit," Gavin observes. "It was to make *Grunty's Revenge* feel different, and also to make use of the Pack Whack, where you would whack Banjo's backpack in front of him. One of the side effects of Banjo starting without Kazooie was that it allowed us to reintroduce players that had played the original *Banjo* to the moves. Because although a lot of them were the same you accessed them in a different way, or how you used them differed."

An aspect of *Grunty's Revenge* that differentiated it even more from the N64 *Banjo* games was its transformation system. Instead of being offered once on specific levels, all unlocked forms could be chosen when visiting shaman Mumbo Jumbo. "The level designs were structured to take account of you having access to all of those transformations, and certain levels were influenced by certain transformations," Gavin remarks. "So the haunted bayou being set in darkness was influenced by the candle transformation. We could have used the mouse transformation a lot more, because it meant Banjo could fit into lots of places. The mouse could also gnaw through things, and there were tons of puzzles we had planned for that. But we couldn't do them all because then the other transformations wouldn't get their time in the spotlight."

After work on *Grunty's Revenge* was completed, but before it launched, a second GBA *Banjo* title was started. Using an abandoned *Diddy Kong* project as its basis, a team led by Gary Richards began development on a flight racer called *Banjo-Racing*. "*Diddy Kong Pilot* got put in limbo when Rare separated from Nintendo. Then there was a massive gap between when it was *that* and when it became *Banjo-Pilot*," Gary reveals. "We were asked to get the game done as *Banjo-Pilot* because THQ wanted to do a deal where there were multiple GBA games involved. *Diddy Kong Pilot* had a few bits and pieces, so some of the tracks remained pretty much the same as they were originally, but the

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
CHARACTER BUILDING

Q&A WITH BANJO CHARACTER DESIGNER/ANIMATOR ED BRYAN

HOW LONG WAS BANJO A RABBIT FOR?
We went from a boy to a rabbit for about a week. The story is that I'm pissed off because Banjo should have been a rabbit, but he clearly should never have been! I've got old DAT tapes that I used to back-up my work, and I sent a couple of them to be archived. Pretty much everything on them was recovered, and I found the rabbit. I've only shared him with Steve Mayles because the internet would go bananas!

WHY WAS CANARY MARY SO HARD TO BEAT IN RACES?
People still complain about breaking their N64 controller trying to beat that stupid character! My younger brother Will wrote the code for that. He always says that you need to slow down, because the code always tries to be ahead of you. So you need to relax a little bit so that you can blast past her at the end. Every time it comes up I tell people that they want to speak to Will!

WHERE DID *NUTS & BOLTS*' BLOCKY LOOK COME FROM?
First of all there was a project called *Banjo X*, and Steve Mayles and I tried to do high-res visuals for that. We thought that if we made the characters in this blocky style that could be a fun thing to do. It also tied in with this idea that the things that you interacted with would be blocky, because we had this idea that you would build stuff from blocks.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
LOST LEVEL
DESIGNER STEVE MALPASS ON NUTS & BOLTS' CUT STAGE

"It was pretty much a trademark of *Banjo* games that each level was its own biome. We had done a fire level, an ice level, a factory level and whatever, so we looked at what we could have in *Nuts & Bolts*. I guess the Wild West was an obvious theme to think of, because we hadn't done that in the first two games. The level had been designed. I would always start with a map, and I've still got that on paper. There was a section of Showdown Town up at the top where there was a seaside area and a pier. There were buildings there, and the doors to Weird West were along there. So I remember sitting with Steve Hurst, the chief environment artist on all of the *Banjo* games, and we would look at this map. The first thing we would do is get an environment, and then we would put a bunch of cubes down. So those would be houses. Then you would get an idea of scale, put a vehicle in it and then drive around to see how long it would take to get from one side to the other. So we got to that stage and then it was the same old story of the game having to come out for Christmas. We were behind schedule and so we had to decide what to cut. Well which level had the least work done on it? And that was my Wild West one."

gameplay structure wasn't there. So a lot of what we did was putting game modes in."

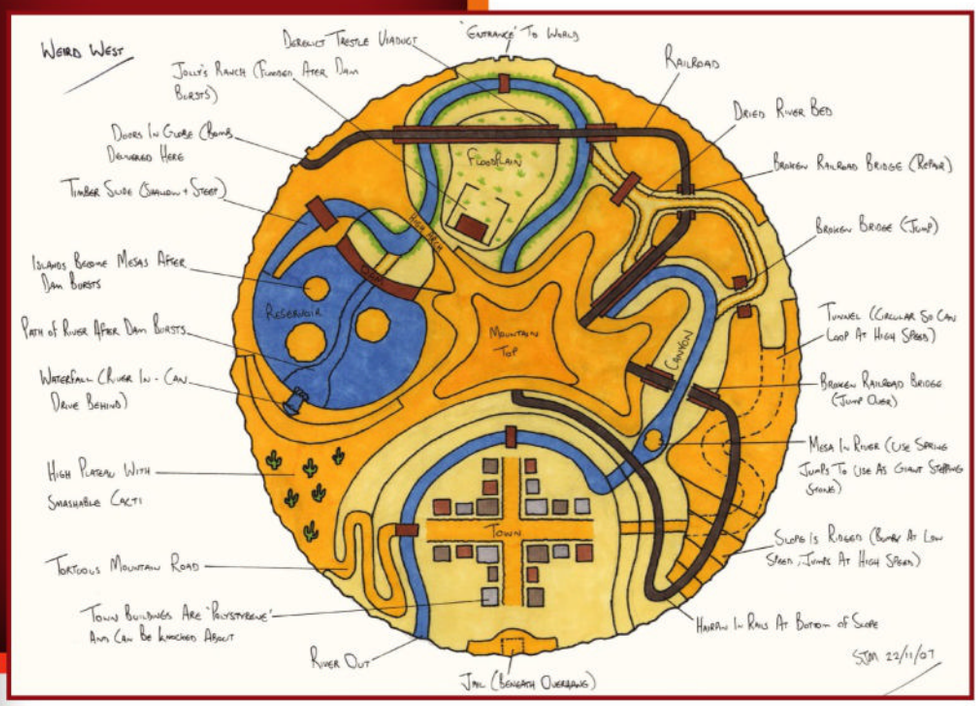
The structure that the *Banjo-Pilot* team implemented included combat with bosses. The inclusion of these was influenced by a Rare title that the Banjo racer was a spiritual successor to, but visual effects took its sky-high boss fights to another level. "Kart racing games like *Diddy Kong Racing* featured boss races, and I think we took inspiration from that," Gary muses. "But we thought about how we could do them with planes, and decided we would make them feel like dogfights. It looked quite cool with the two planes flying over the cloud layers, but it was just using the mechanics that were already there in the cheapest way possible. We had straight tracks in the boss fights that just looped, so they were super simple but were also very effective."

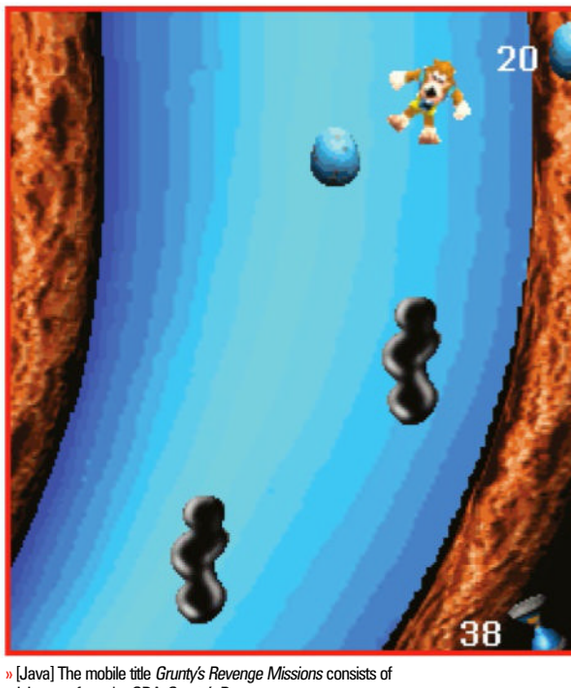
> "WE WERE ASKED TO GET THE GAME DONE AS BANJO-PILOT BECAUSE THQ WANTED TO DO A DEAL WHERE THERE WERE MULTIPLE GBA GAMES INVOLVED"
> **GARY RICHARDS**

Given that *Diddy Kong Pilot* was going to be a sequel to *Diddy Kong Racing*, it seems curious that the scrapped GBA title didn't focus on karts like the earlier game. *Banjo-Pilot* retained planes as its mode of transport, but why was flight favoured originally? "The original reason for having planes was that *Diddy Kong Pilot* used a tilt cartridge, because its team thought it would be a cool way to control a plane," Gary discloses. "So planes made sense. Unfortunately, when we lost the *Donkey Kong* licence the tilt cartridge was just getting in the way, because Nintendo wasn't giving us the support. The big problem with tilting the GBA's screen with a racing game was that you couldn't see what was happening, because it was just rubbish when you moved it around."

Other aspects of *Banjo-Pilot* reflected the earlier *Banjo* games. The racer's pick-ups were taken from the previous titles, cutscenes were added to give a sense of an adventure and the two heroes of the series got to settle any scores that they had. "It was especially important to have floating collectables because you had a lot of space since you could fly vertically, and it made players go off the racing line," Gary assesses. "The cutscenes were down to us trying to give the player a reason to do the races. I know the storyline was quite thin, but at least it made a bit of sense of the races. Then we had Banjo

» [Game Boy Advance] Many of the collectables from the N64 *Banjo* games are also pick-ups in *Banjo-Pilot*.


Weird West
Derelict Trestle Viaduct
Entrance To World
Railroad
Jolly's Ranch (Flooded After Dam Bursts)
Dried River Bed
Doors In Grube (Ghosts Destroyed Here)
Broken Railroad Bridge (Repair)
Timber Slide (Shallow + Steep)
Broken Bridge (Jump)
Islands Become Mesas After Dam Bursts
Tunnel (Circular So Can Loop At High Speed)
Path of River After Dam Bursts
Broken Railroad Bridge (Jump Over)
Waterfall (River In - Can Drive Behind)
Mesa In River (Use Springs Jumps To Use As Giant Steppingstones)
High Plateau With Smashable Cacti
Slope Is Rigged (Bump At Low Speed, Jumps At High Speed)
Tortuous Mountain Road
Town Buildings Are 'Physitreene' And Can Be Knocked About
Harpoon In Rails At Bottom of Slope
River Out
Jail (Beneath Overpass)
Reservoir
Mountain Top
Canyon
Town
Floodplain
Tunnel
SJM 22/11/07



» [Java] The mobile title *Grunty's Revenge Missions* consists of minigames from the GBA *Grunty's Revenge*.

and Kazooie in a dogfight just because we had two player characters, so why not?"

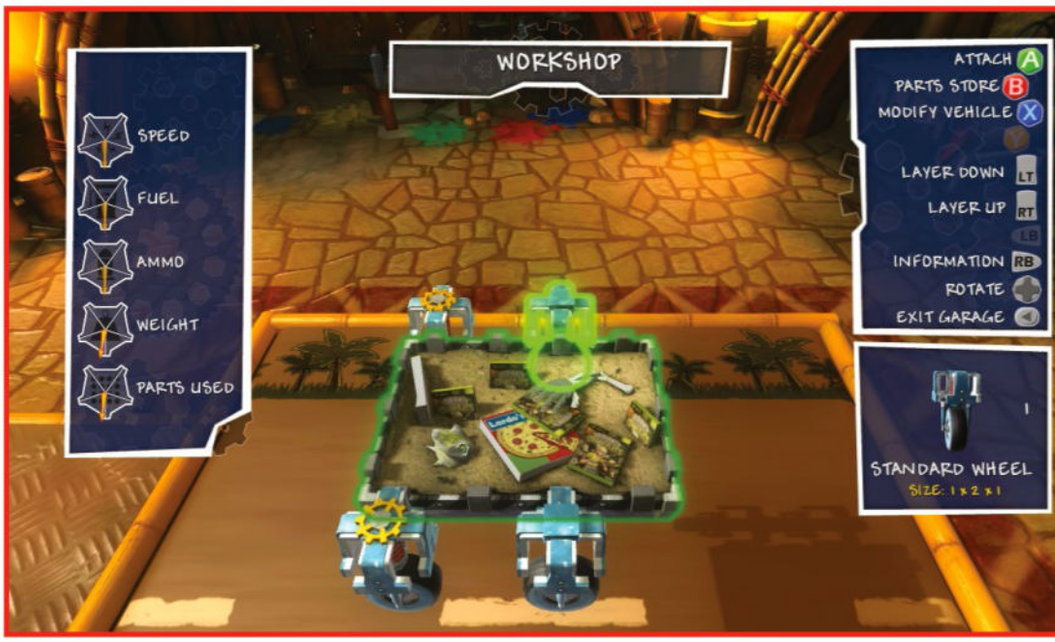
Like *Grunty's Revenge*, *Banjo-Pilot* received solid reviews. Soon after its release, three Xbox 360 projects were begun, including remakes of the N64 originals, as *Banjo* coder Chris Sutherland remembers. "I wasn't involved directly with the Xbox 360 releases, but I know [the games] went to 4J Studios in Scotland, and they did a lot of the work for those. They did an amazing job. They made the Stop 'N' Swop system work so that the two *Banjo* games worked together. You could get the Ice Key and the other things from the Stop 'N' Swop and they would actually work together. They did a load of other things as well."

The studio trusted by Rare to update the first two *Banjo* games for the Xbox 360 naturally updated the N64 titles' visuals, but as Chris points out, it also addressed minor complaints that players had about certain aspects of the originals' gameplay. "The framerates were a lot better, and the Xbox 360 versions were recompiled with updated textures. There were also improvements to the camera and controls. Another thing that 4J did was to improve the level of detail when you were close to things without things popping in. And in the original *Banjo-Kazooie*, if you tried to collect all 101 notes on each level and died you had to go back and collect them all again. 4J Studios took that requirement away in the Xbox 360 version."

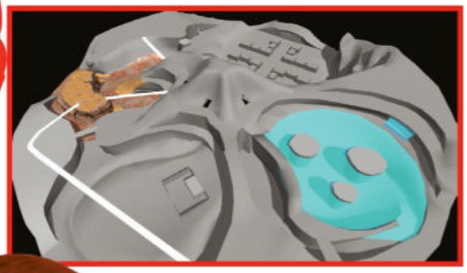
» [Game Boy Advance] *Banjo-Pilot* started off life as a *Diddy Kong Racing* game, but changed when Rare left Nintendo.

» [Game Boy Advance] *Banjo-Pilot*'s multiplayer mode supports up to four players using link-up cables and multiple cartridges.

» [Game Boy Advance] As well as Banjo and Kazooie, *Banjo-Pilot* lets you race as Mumbo Jumbo and other *Banjo* characters.



» [Xbox 360] The vehicle construction aspect of *Nuts & Bolts* wasn't originally intended for a *Banjo* game.



» This low-level render of the cancelled *Nuts & Bolts* level Weird West is as far as the world got.

The third Xbox 360 *Banjo* project went through almost as many iterations as *Dream* had. Steve Malpass worked with Gregg Mayles on the design for *Nuts & Bolts*, as it was ultimately called, and he explains how a Rare founder gave it its core concept. "There was quite a wait because it changed direction a few times, before eventually Tim Stamper had the idea of a virtual Lego set to allow players to build vehicles," Steve comments. "It was decided that we merge that idea with *Banjo* somehow. We had the first level of *Nuts & Bolts* – Mumbo's Mountain – and we put these vehicles in it. We then adapted the layout to accommodate them, so we had ramps and that sort of thing. Then we needed to make some kind of 3D editor user interface, which was a nightmare!"

Having worked out how to allow players to build 3D vehicles, work started on a hub environment called Showdown Town that Banjo could walk around, although there would be less walking and more driving in the game's eclectic worlds. "Showdown Town was the part of the game that was most like the previous games; that was where all the platforming was," Steve reviews. "There *were* moments in the worlds where you would have to get out of the vehicle to put things in them, but the on-foot stuff there was pretty much limited to that. Showdown Town was divided into sections, but rather than having very obvious paths connecting them, the boundaries between them were quite blurred – much like a real town."

» [Xbox 360] In the *Nuts & Bolts* missions you typically drive, but you're on-foot more in the game's hub.

The *Nuts & Bolts* team called its challenge-filled levels 'worlds', and like real worlds they were spherical, although Banjo visited the inside of them rather than their surfaces. Steve puts their spherical shape down to that being the most fun option. "We designed the challenges with the thought that you had to navigate the worlds with a vehicle, and since they were set inside globes everything was circular. The whole 'game globe' idea came together during the design of Showdown Town. We wanted players to get an object from a dispenser, and then transport it to something. But what shape should the object be? Well obviously a ball, because it would be tricky to transport and would roll around if you dropped it. So as the worlds were contained in balls that meant they had to be circular."

> "WE HAD THE FIRST LEVEL OF NUTS & BOLTS – MUMBO'S MOUNTAIN – AND WE PUT THESE VEHICLES IN IT. WE THEN ADAPTED THE LAYOUT TO ACCOMMODATE THEM"
> **STEVE MALPASS**

As well as challenges and exploration, the core gameplay in *Nuts & Bolts* rewarded players with abilities – much like the N64 *Banjo* titles. However the Xbox 360 follow-up applied these upgrades in a different way than the original games had. "When you started the game you were in the town square, and you were surrounded by steep slopes, and it wasn't until you had certain vehicle parts like the High-grip Tyres that you could go up them," Steve highlights. "There was also a move where you put a spring on the bottom of the cars that you used to jump over houses or to get to high-up areas. So those abilities were achieved by upgrading your vehicle rather than getting new moves for the characters."

Although the construction element in *Nuts & Bolts* proved divisive on its launch, the sequel certainly had its fans. At the time of writing no further *Banjo-Kazooie* titles have appeared, although Banjo and Kazooie surprisingly both featured as combatants in Nintendo's *Super Smash Bros Ultimate*, while *Yooka-Replaylee*, the latest in a *series of* spiritual successors to *Banjo-Kazooie*, has just been released. It only seems fair then that *Yooka-Laylee* and *Banjo* coder Chris Sutherland has the last word on Banjo's first adventure. "I think the thing that best stands the test of time is the characters and the repartee between them. That helped to inject more feeling into them rather than them just being token mascots. Graphically I think the game being quite cartoony means that it holds up better than contemporary games that tried to be super realistic. The music also stands up, and I suppose the odd noises that I had Banjo and Kazooie saying have stayed with people for many years. Who knew that was going to be a thing?"

» [Xbox 360] All sorts of driving challenges feature in *Nuts & Bolts*, from speed runs to hectic retrievals.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: SPIRITUAL SUCCESSORS

CHRIS SUTHERLAND ON THE BANJO-INSPIRED YOOKA-LAYLEE TITLES

WHY DID PLAYTONIC MAKE A SPIRITUAL SUCCESSOR TO *BANJO-KAZOOIE*?

There was still a lot of interest online about *Banjo-Kazooie*. People felt that they needed a new *Banjo* game that was in the style of the first two games. Obviously there was *Nuts & Bolts*, but for a lot of people that wasn't the game that they were hoping it would be. So *Yooka-Laylee* was really to satisfy them. We also had many of the people who had worked on the first two *Banjo* games at Playtonic.

WHY WAS *YOOKA-LAYLEE AND THE IMPOSSIBLE LAIR* 2D?

In the first game we originally had ideas of having 2D sections similar to what you saw in *Impossible Lair*. So then we thought why didn't we tackle that side of things and make something that was *just* 2D? Again, we also had a history where we had a lot of people that had worked on *Donkey Kong Country*, so there was that connection there of trying to do something that was side-scrolling with our characters in it.

HOW DOES *YOOKA-REPLAYLEE* IMPROVE ON *YOOKA-LAYLEE*?

There's more guidance in terms of what you need to do. Then the moves are all available at the same time, and you can chain them together in a better fashion. There's been an overhaul of the art and animation, and a lot of the levels. The bosses have been upgraded and improved. Then in terms of collectables there are a lot more things to discover, and Rextro's got his own top-down 3D adventure.

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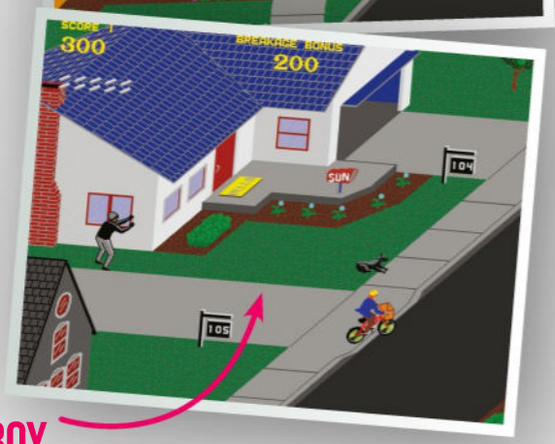
8-BIT JOBS

THIS MONTH SEES US LOOKING AT A NUMBER OF JOB-BASED ROLES YOU COULD PLAY ON 8-BIT HOME COMPUTERS. HOW MANY DID YOU GET TO EXPERIENCE?



PAPERBOY

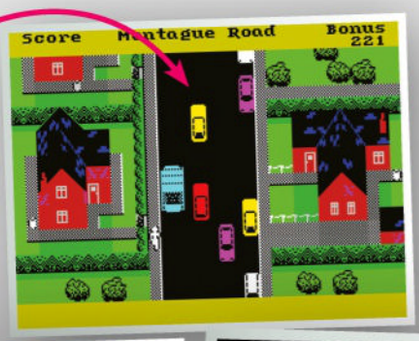
AS SEEN IN PAPERBOY

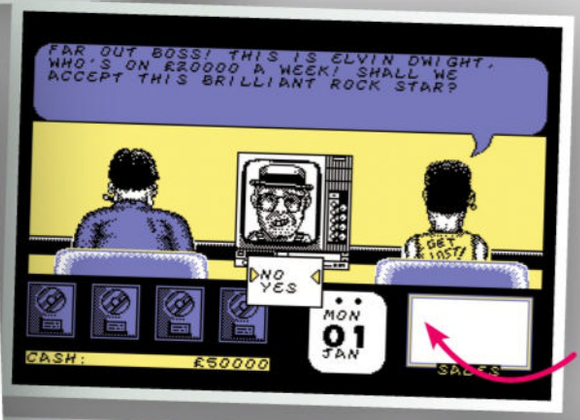
Darran once got lost on his paper round and was three hours late for school as a result. While a good sense of direction isn't needed in Atari's game, you do have to look out for cars, workmen, dogs and countless other hazards that will all knock you off your trusty BMX if given half the chance.

REFUSE COLLECTOR

AS SEEN IN TRASHMAN

This genius offering from Malcolm Evans tasks you with keeping the streets of Bath clean by dumping a set number of bins into a slowly moving dustcart. It's far from an easy job though as you have to contend with dangerous vehicles, angry dogs and a tight time limit. At least you don't have to worry about developing a bad back.

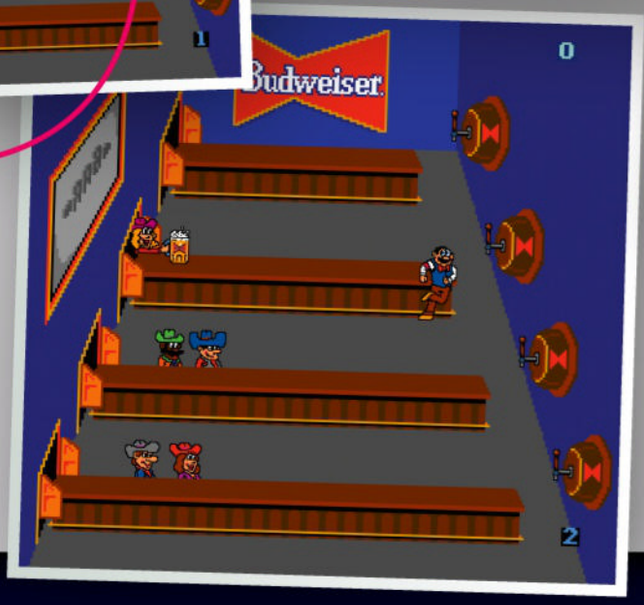




MANAGER

AS SEEN IN ROCKSTAR ATE MY HAMSTER

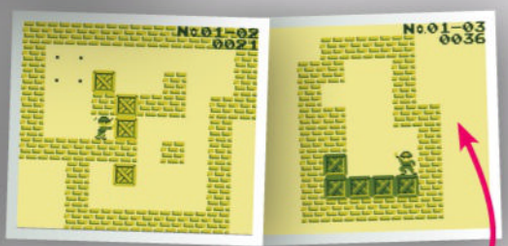
There are a host of videogames that let you play as a manager, but none are as amusing as Colin Jones' game. After selecting your band members (all parodies of famous musicians) you have to aim for chart stardom by juggling gigging, publicity stunts, making records and numerous other tasks without going bankrupt. Your goal: earn four Gold Discs in a year.



BARTENDER

AS SEEN IN TAPPER

Bally Midway's arcade game doesn't require you to create cocktails or flip and spin shakers but you'll still need plenty of dexterity to please the game's many thirsty patrons. Orders come thick and fast and you not only have to pour drinks for customers but also collect their emptied glasses. Thank goodness they leave you tips.



WAREHOUSE OPERATOR

AS SEEN IN SOKOBAN

Who says working in a warehouse is easy? This devious puzzler has been flummoxing gamers for decades as it requires you to push crates into their designated storage areas without trapping yourself or the crate. There have been countless variations over the years so you're bound to have played a version of it at some point.

CLOWN

AS SEEN IN CIRCUS CHARLIE

■ Charlie The Clown has to endure all manner of misery in order to please circus visitors in Konami's entertaining arcade game. From riding on the backs of dangerous lions to gingerly walking across tightropes and dodging deadly knife throwers, poor old Charlie just can't catch a break. And to top things off, he doesn't even get danger pay.

POSTMAN

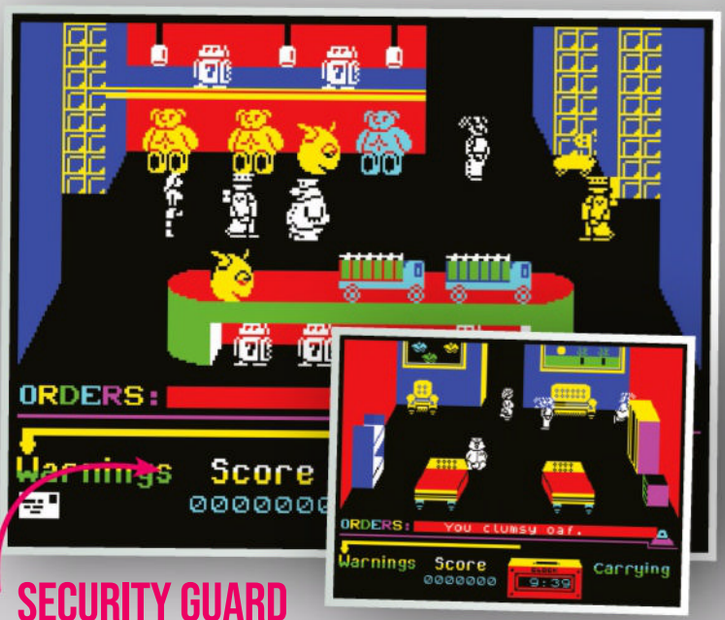
AS SEEN IN POSTMAN PAT

■ It may be a game aimed at children, but you'll still need to be a fairly proficient gamer if you want Pat to make all of his deliveries. There's a strict time limit to manage and you also lack a map, meaning you have to keep an eye out for flashing indicators as you bomb around Greendale.

EXCAVATOR OPERATOR

AS SEEN IN JCB DIGGER

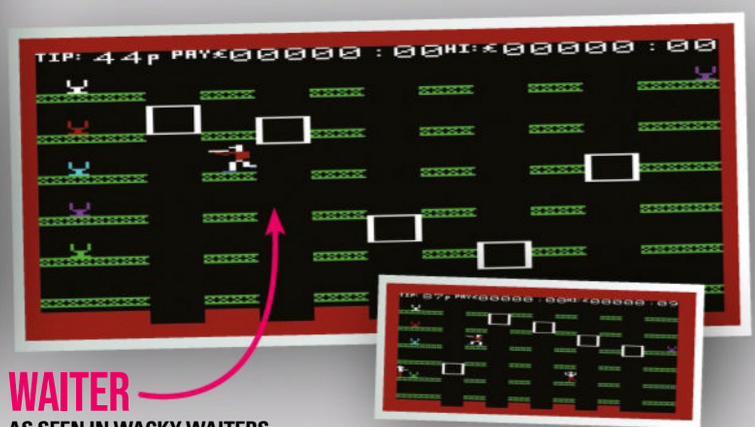
■ Digging holes is tough work, but it's certainly more manageable when you have a bloody great digger as a tool. You're excavating your island home not to build the foundations for a new metropolis, but because it's the easiest way to kill the Meanies that live there with you. Dig a hole, bury them alive and then sit back and enjoy the view.



SECURITY GUARD

AS SEEN IN GRUMPY GUMPHRY SUPERSLEUTH

■ General dogsbody would be a more apt description here, as poor old Gumphry is at the whim of his manager. In addition to worrying about his store's security, the beleaguered security guard has to perform numerous tasks from shooting ducks to serving tea. Needless to say there's a lot of running between various screens as you try to complete your many duties.



WAITER

AS SEEN IN WACKY WAITERS

■ Waiters have it tough at the best of times, thanks to low wages, surly customers and sore feet. It's even worse in Eugene Evans' VIC-20 platformer as your long-suffering serf also has to deal with multiple lifts that can be an absolute nightmare to cross. Cross them you must, though, as the quicker the crossing, the better your tip.

THE MAKING OF MAGICLAND DIZZY

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
- **DEVELOPER:** BIG RED SOFTWARE/ OLIVER TWINS/ CODEMASTERS
- **PLATFORM:** ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS
- **RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

THERE WASN'T ENOUGH TIME FOR THE ORIGINAL CREATORS OF THE DIZZY SERIES TO HAVE A FOURTH CRACK AT PRODUCING A NEW DIZZY ADVENTURE FOR HOME COMPUTERS. BUT WITH THE BATON PASSED TO A NEW DEVELOPMENT TEAM, ANOTHER CRACKING QUEST EMERGED

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SPELLBOUND DIZZY

PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 1991

SEYMOUR GOES TO HOLLYWOOD (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS

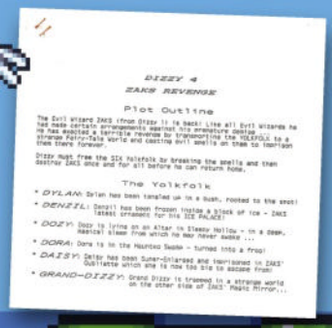
RELEASED: 1991

PRINCE OF THE YOLKFOLK

PLATFORM: ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 1991

» *Magicland Dizzy* was originally released as part of the *Dizzy Collection* compilation.



DIZZY 4
ZAKS REVENGE

Plot Outline

The Evil Wizard ZAKS (from Dizzy 1) is back! Like all Evil Wizards he has made certain arrangements against his premature demise. He has erected a terrible revenge by transporting the YOLKFOLK to a strange Fairy-Tale world and casting evil spells on them to imprison them there forever.

Dizzy must free the SIX Yolkfolk by breaking the spells and then destroy ZAKS once and for all before he can return home.

The Yolkfolk

- DYLAN: Dylan has been tangled up in a bush, rooted to the spot!
- DENZIL: Denzil has been frozen inside a block of ice - ZAKS latest ornament for his ICE PALACE!
- DOZY: Dozy is lying on an Altar in Sleepy Hollow - in a deep, medical sleep from which he may never awake ...
- DORA: Dora is in the Haunted Swamp - turned into a frog!
- DAISY: Daisy has been Super-Enlarged and imprisoned in ZAKS' Dungeons which she is now too big to escape from!
- GRAND-DIZZY: Grand Dizzy is trapped in a strange world on the other side of ZAKS' Magic Mirror...

» The original design document with the working title *Dizzy 4 Zaks Revenge*.

The fourth iteration of *Dizzy* was, by and large, the same as the previous three. But Codemasters' popular series of graphic adventures, which spawned many an 'egg-cellent' pun in the computing press, was also a tad different.

Those first three games – *Dizzy: The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure*, *Treasure Island Dizzy* and *Fantasy World Dizzy* – had been written by Philip and Andrew Oliver, aka the Oliver twins. But since the brothers were looking to crack the fast-growing console market with the NES-lead adventure/platformer, *Fantastic Dizzy*, they had no choice but to pass on the design baton to someone else. "*Fantastic Dizzy* was a huge undertaking and it consumed most of our time," Philip says. "The 8-bit Spectrum and Amstrad markets were clearly fading by 1990, with players moving to the Atari ST and Amiga and we felt the real future was in the consoles, especially in America with the NES."

Although Philip and Andrew sketched out the design basics for what would become *Magicland Dizzy*, Neal Vincent was tasked with fleshing it out. Neal was Codemasters' stock control assistant working at the Lower Farm House offices in Southam and he volunteered to help when the Codies' bosses put out a call for assistance with the project. He'd never worked on a game before and he hadn't even played a previous *Dizzy* game so he started familiarising himself with the titles before coming up with ideas to take the game forward.

Philip can't, with any great certainty, say who did the bulk of the design work. "It's hard to remember all the exact details now but I did find some old map sketches and notes under the title *Zaks' Revenge*, which were very much in line with our earlier *Dizzy* games," he explains. "That makes it difficult to say where Neal's work began and ours ended. Either we created them ourselves or Neal did such a good job of imitating our style that they looked just like ours – and I suspect it was the latter."

The *Zaks Revenge* design document is available to view on the Oliver Twins' website and it briefly lays out the plot. The Evil Wizard Zaks – resurrected from the first *Dizzy* game – has magically trapped Dizzy's

» [ZX Spectrum] There were lots of fantasy and magic references in the game making it fun to spot them all.

» [Amstrad CPC] Watch out for enemies such as the bats who will zap Dizzy's energy during a collision.

» [Amstrad CPC] Not so much a jumping the shark moment but a challenging attempt to ride the fin to the castle back door.

friends and family – the Yolkfolk – and Dizzy has to go around, interacting with characters, collecting items and solving puzzles in order to rescue them. In this instance, players also needed to collect 30 diamonds and, as with other *Dizzy* games, avoid dying.

The original document for *Magicland* said Dizzy would have just one life, used once an energy bar was depleted but Neal didn't like the idea of players having just a single life. He's on record, on the Yolkfolk.com forum, as saying he wanted to do away with "those annoying one-hit deaths". It's something Philip and Andrew had no problems with. "I was surprised to hear the original design only listed one life because we were always keen to give players three lives," Philip says. "The only time we broke that rule was with *Treasure Island Dizzy* where a logic bug forced us to strip out the lives system to meet the release date but, as a rule, three lives gave players a fairer chance and we always preferred that."

The health bar was the Olivers' decision. "We'd already designed it for *Fantastic Dizzy* on the NES because we wanted to move away from the old 'one mistake and you're dead' approach and make it feel less punishing." The Olivers were also behind the decision to switch to jewels. "It was mostly cosmetic – just a way of keeping it fresh so screenshots of the new game looked distinct from earlier ones."

The overall idea – both for the Olivers and Neal – was not to reinvent *Dizzy*. "The formula was working well and fans loved the mix of platforming and puzzles," Philip says. "What we wanted was a fresh story, a few new characters and new challenges for players who were already hooked. Neal and the development team kept the structure familiar but pushed it forward with the setting, which leaned into fantasy and magic more than before."

> "BIG RED'S OFFICES WERE PRETTY ROUGH – BASICALLY A STEP UP FROM A WAREHOUSE, WITH CHEAP SECOND-HAND FURNITURE"
> PHILIP OLIVER

The development team was Big Red Software, a company founded by Paul Ranson in 1989. It had begun working with Codemasters and it focussed on the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC so it was felt to be a safe pair of hands. R Fred Williams, who had converted *New York Warriors* to those two systems and programmed *Wacky Darts*, was given the job of coding the game. "I'd never played a *Dizzy* game before then," he admits. "I was a BBC Micro kid."

Development began around mid-1990. The Olivers handed over the design notes (the only change from Neal's work was the scrapping of mushrooms in favour of an Eat-me Cake and Drink-me Potion for fear of encouraging kids to eat fungi) and they then waited until the game reached an alpha stage before really getting involved again. In the meantime, Fred began familiarising himself with the *Fantasy World Dizzy* code and map editor source that the Olivers had provided. "The engine was a nicely organised thing as you'd expect for ▶

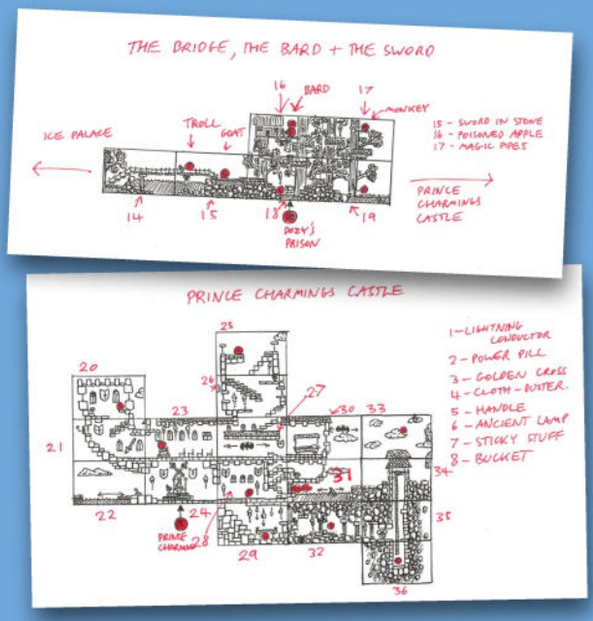
DIZZY'S EGGS-TRA ADVENTURE

SPECCY FANS NEEDN'T PLUNGE STRAIGHT INTO MAGICLAND DIZZY

Did you know that Dizzy had a cousin called Danny? You will if you've ever played *Dizzy Three… And A Half!: Into Magicland* since it's the only time the character has ever made an appearance in the series. Programmed by R Fred Williams with graphics by Neil Adamson, this small, five-screen ZX Spectrum game was a covertape exclusive mounted on issue 84 of *Crash* magazine. Designed as a prequel of sorts for *Magicland Dizzy*, it tasked players with rescuing Danny and getting Grand Dizzy's teleport machine working to allow Dizzy to embark on his new adventure.

"The marketing team at Codemasters had a great relationship with Newsfield which published *Crash* and *Zzap!64*," says Dizzy creator Philip Oliver. "They came up with the idea of a short exclusive *Dizzy* game that could be given away with the magazine. The thinking was that it would help sell the issue of *Crash*, while at the same time building excitement for *Magicland Dizzy*, which was due out shortly after. It was a win-win arrangement and no money changed hands."

But why did Danny never make another appearance in the *Dizzy* series? "The character was simply created for that one-off teaser and wasn't carried forward into later games," Philip says.



» The hand-drawn developer notes show the position of all of the various items in the game.

» [Amstrad CPC] Dizzy was able to converse with lots of different characters including the Yolkfolk.

something that had already been iterated on three times," Fred says. "It cut the development time down."

Fred soon began to build Dizzy's new magical world. "Big Red's offices were pretty rough," Philip recalls, having paid a visit. "It was basically a step up from a warehouse, with cheap second-hand furniture and a very scruffy feel. I imagine it was probably the lowest-cost office space they could find around Leamington at the time. Still, what mattered was the talent inside and they produced a very solid game."

> "IT WAS ACTUALLY A GOOD EXPERIENCE TO SEE DIZZY EVOLVE IN SOMEONE ELSE'S HANDS" PHILIP OLIVER

Development essentially involved tweaking the *Fantasy World Dizzy* code, implementing the graphics designed by Neil Adamson and Christopher Graham and adding music from Lyndon Sharp. That, of course, over-simplifies the process but Fred says it was relatively straightforward. "Key to the *Dizzy* 'look' was the way the rooms were built up out of arbitrarily sized, individually placed graphics rather than being a grid of tiled 16x16 blocks," he explains. "There was also a robust system in place for entities in the world that you interacted with. There was custom code for movement and puzzle interactions."

Having more than one life proved vital, even with the energy bar in place. "The lives must have been bumped up from one pretty swiftly because the game had lots of instant death from water and lava to Big Daisy," Fred says. He's referring to Dizzy's inability to breathe under water, survive touching molten rock (into which Zak's ring must be thrown) and the stark *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* reference that had players trying to figure whether an Eat-me Cake or a Drink-me Potion would work on an enlarged Daisy. "There were new things like floating notes, zzzzs and the scaled-up Daisy but the underlying engine was flexible enough to make them easy to add," Fred says.

There were some challenging aspects to the development, though. "Code-wise, the clouds needed a revamp to resemble the NES version rather than *Fantasy World Dizzy*'s 'platforms with invisible holes,'" Fred says. "If I remember correctly, the trickiest challenge involved the clouds above the volcano. In particular, that they needed to keep carrying you off the top of one screen to the bottom of the next one."

Once the game reached the alpha stage, the code was sent to Neal and the Olivers to take a look at. "We were pretty much work-for-hire so we'd send the build to Codemasters, get feedback from Neal and the Olivers… rinse and repeat," Fred says. Philip and Andrew would simply ensure the game was heading in their desired direction. "We'd sit down and play builds then send back play test notes, often handwritten

CONVERSION CAPERS

MAGICLAND DIZZY BOUNCED ONTO A FEW PLATFORMS

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Introducing a health bar, a host of diamonds to collect, a new character in Dizzy's sister Dora and, of course, a whole new set of puzzles to solve, *Magicland Dizzy* proved to be another hit for Codemasters. This version had colour clash and an annoying tune but was otherwise fluid and fun.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ *Magicland Dizzy* on the CPC was almost identical to the Spectrum version. It looked and sounded pretty much the same (regardless of the different choice of palette) and it even shared the odd development error of having the Eat-me Cake hovering above the water on the Drawbridge screen.

C64

■ Coded by Neal Gray, this version used graphics from the Spectrum game but the overall look was more impressive thanks to the addition of a border and a cleaner HUD. It also had a better soundtrack but control of Dizzy felt a tad more clumsy – jumps were higher and rolls less controlled.

» [ZX Spectrum] As always, the main aim of the game was to collect items and solve lots of puzzles.

» [Amstrad CPC] It's the special ghost-busting Power Pill inspired by *Pac-Man*. The Olivers' Blitz Games went on to develop *Pac-Man World 3*.

» [ZX Spectrum] The Yolkfolk weren't merely characters but the focal point of the puzzles – how to wake Dozy?

reports," Philip says. "It was great fun to step back in once the builds were playable, give feedback and feel part of the process without having to carry the whole project ourselves. It was actually a good experience to see *Dizzy* evolve in someone else's hands."

Even so, there was still room and time for some personal indulgence, particularly when players needed to pick-up a Power Pill to kill a ghost. "*Pac-Man* was one of the games that inspired us to get into the industry in the first place, so it was our way of tipping the hat," Philip says. "It's also just a fantastic mechanic – everyone instantly understands how it works."

Magicland Dizzy was ready by October 1990. "So a smidge over two months, all-in," Fred says. It was released on the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Commodore 64 as part of the *Dizzy Collection* (Ian Gray handled the C64 port). It meant players not only got *Magicland Dizzy* but the first three *Dizzy* adventures and, as a bonus, the maze game *Fast Food* too.

The reasoning behind this was clear. "Codemasters was keen not to be seen only as a budget publisher," Philip says. "They wanted to put out 'big box' games at the £10 price point or above so the idea emerged to create a *Dizzy* compilation and justify that larger format by including a brand-new game." But that's not to say it wasn't controversial. "Making *Magicland Dizzy* exclusive to the compilation guaranteed strong sales, because *Dizzy* fans were always going to buy it – and along the way they'd also get some of the earlier games they might only have pirated or missed," Philip says. "It worked well: the *Dizzy Collection* sold strongly. But Codemasters did take note that some players were unhappy the new game wasn't available on its own at the budget £2.99 price. So, a few months later, they did release it individually at that budget price too."

» [NES] *Wonderland Dizzy* for the NES was based on *Magicland Dizzy*. It was released in 2015 after Philip Oliver found the source code.

It proved to be a hit. Gamers loved the fourth title and it was ported to the Atari ST, Amiga and DOS the following year. Further *Dizzy* adventures followed with Big Red's involvement. "We'd known the team at Big Red for a while and we had a lot of respect for their skills," Philip says. "We trusted them to do a great job. And they did."

AMIGA

■ This was a beautifully presented version of one of Dizzy's finest outings with detailed cartoon-like graphics, lovely animations, a colourful HUD and a remixed rendition of the C64 theme by Matthew Simmonds. In fact, there was little to fault with Derek Leigh-Gilchrist's slick Amiga port.

ATARI ST

■ The main difference between the Atari ST and Amiga ports – despite being coded by Derek Leigh-Gilchrist using Leigh Christian's awesome graphics – was the loss of the large HUD. It was replaced by a black strip displaying the screen name, lives left, diamonds collected and the health bar.

PC

■ The DOS version was very much the same as the Atari ST in terms of how it looked – the playing screen also included the black strip. It was also identical in the manner in which it played as well. But, of all of the musical soundtracks, this port arguably had the most toe-tapping tune.

TIME

Mission Impossibubble

THE NAME GAME

» COMMODORE 64 » 1989 » HEWSON

It's fair to say that I was completely ignorant about the Commodore 64 when I received it as a hand-me-down from my cousins. Their favourite magazine, *Commodore Format*, was still soldiering on but I wasn't aware of that at the time, since our newsagent didn't stock it. I didn't even get any of their old magazines, just lots of the covertapes, so I largely decided what to play based on how much the title appealed to me. *Mission Impossibubble* scored pretty highly there, just because it sounds like a title my mum would come up with – she's the kind of person who says "bubble bubble wibble wobble water" when she can't remember what a hot tub is called.

Fortunately, this highly scientific method didn't lead me wrong. *Mission Impossibubble* is a maze game in which you roam around, shooting enemies and trying to find pieces of a scroll that will allow you to rescue the kidnapped baby bubble, which you then have to return to the start of the maze. It's a fiendish challenge thanks to all of the teleporting around each maze, and I'm not embarrassed to say that it was far too tough for me as a seven year old, but I enjoyed it all the same – it looked and sounded good, and had a level of arcade immediacy that I'd come to expect from the console games I'd been raised on. Playing it today, it's one of those games that doesn't do anything particularly special, but does everything it does pretty well.

Fortunately, it's actually a pretty easy game to play now as it was released on the Evercade, as part of *The C64 Collection 2*. For a game that is best remembered as part of that *Commodore Format* tape and the *4th Dimension* compilation, it seems very fitting that it's available as part of a compilation cartridge today too. ✱

ULTIMATE GUIDE
The Great

IT'S 1942 AND HALF-TIME IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR, WITH THE ALLIES AND AXIS POWERS LOCKED IN A BRUTAL CONFLICT. FOR YOU, THOUGH, THE WAR IS OVER. OR IS IT? JOIN RETRO GAMER AS WE DIG INTO OCEAN'S MAGNIFICENT WARTIME ADVENTURE, THE GREAT ESCAPE

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

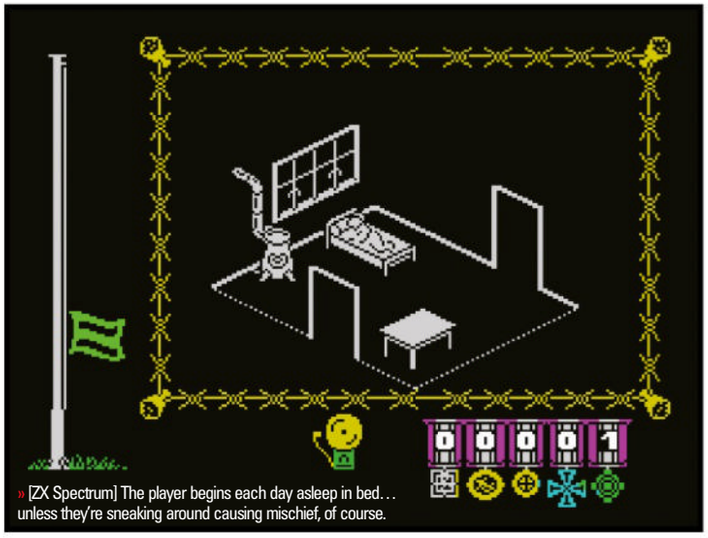
Even wars have rules. First formed in the latter half of the Nineteenth century, the Geneva Conventions continue today to govern many aspects of military conflict. In 1931, it updated the earlier Hague Regulations directing the treatment of prisoners of war. Covering provisions, clothing, religious requirements and more, the 1931 Geneva Convention set down the rules as to how combatants on both sides were to treat prisoners during wartime, a prescient update with another devastating war breaking out eight years later. Sadly, it wasn't always obeyed during World War II.

In Ocean's *The Great Escape*, you're a captured soldier, sent to a high-security prisoner-of-war camp, an adapted castle and its grounds, overlooking the chilly North Sea. Your fellow POWs are veterans of the prison, and have given up, accepting their fate and ready to sit out the rest of the war. As a fresh arrival, you consider it your duty to try and get back to your colleagues, or even just disrupt the German war machine as it ruthlessly pummels Europe.

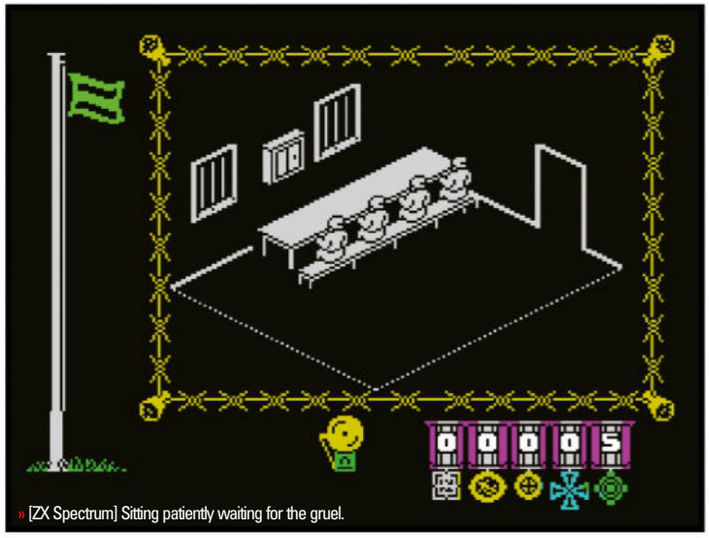
Based on the actual real-life wartime event (rather than the 1963 United Artists movie), *The Great Escape* is presented in a bleak black-and-white isometric display and begins with the player asleep in their bed. Soon the bell is ringing, however, and it's time to stroll out of the prefabricated hut and meet in the north-west corner for roll call. Here, the prisoners line up as the guards count heads to make sure no one has slipped away overnight. Then it's off to the canteen for breakfast, followed by an exercise period and another roll call. Attend these diligently, and it's finally back to your bed before another uneventful day dawns. To keep things under control, guards endlessly patrol the rooftops and towers, as well as the camp grounds. Your fellow prisoners mill around listlessly, while the camp commandant strides around his domain with an air of Germanic haughtiness, ready to pounce on any miscreant.

> **"YOUR FELLOW POWS ARE VETERANS OF THE PRISON, AND HAVE GIVEN UP, ACCEPTING THEIR FATE AND READY TO SIT OUT THE REST OF THE WAR"**

Despite this strict routine, there's plenty of opportunity for sneaking off. Two sets of wire fencing bracket the southern and eastern portions of the camp, and guards and dogs patrol the corridor between. Until you're ready to escape, it's best to avoid these areas. Also to the west is the exercise area, into which the prisoners are allowed once a day. A brace of watch towers overlook the camp, the guards constantly monitoring the prisoners' activities. To the west is the Red Cross parcel room (forbidden entry), the canteen



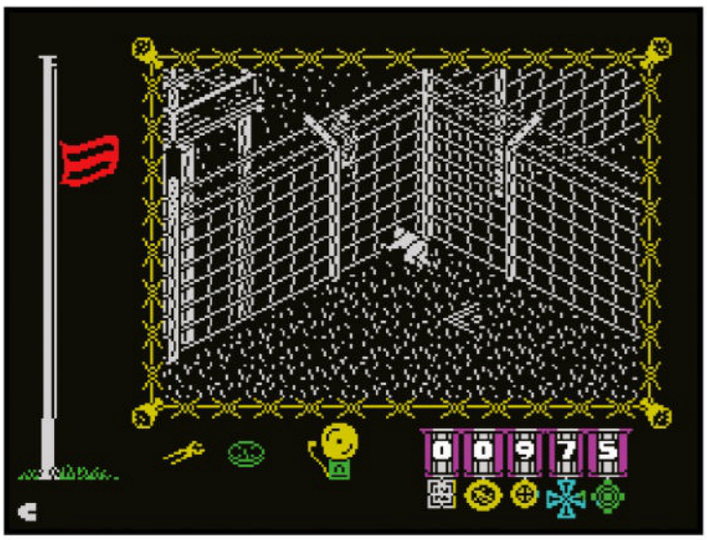
» [ZX Spectrum] The player begins each day asleep in bed… unless they're sneaking around causing mischief, of course.



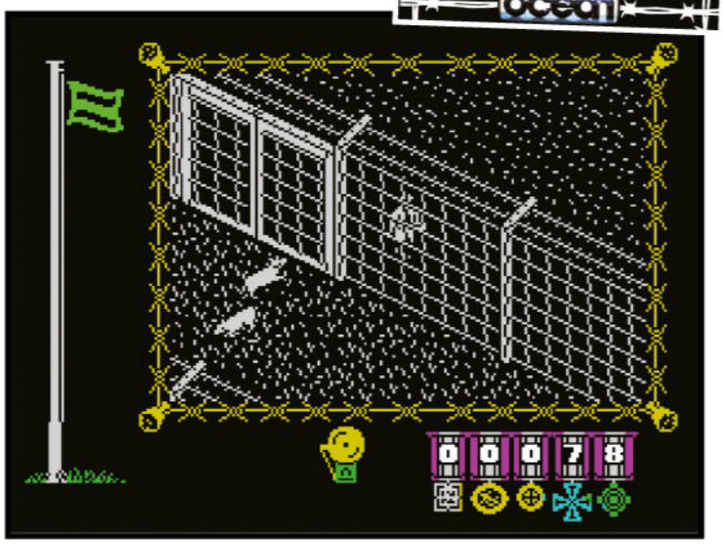
» [ZX Spectrum] Sitting patiently waiting for the gruel.

Escape

» *The Great Escape*'s fantastic cover from artist Bob Wakelin.



» [ZX Spectrum] In the exercise yard, patiently snipping at the wire.



» [ZX Spectrum] The camp guard dogs prowl the grounds endlessly.

Conversion Capers

A PEEK THROUGH THE BARBED WIRE OF EACH GREAT ESCAPE

ZX SPECTRUM

■ With its stark monochrome graphics, which for once perfectly suit the gameplay, *The Great Escape* is one of the computer's finest arcade adventures. Slick, smooth and supremely atmospheric, it proved that even by 1986, there was still life in the isometric projection style of gaming.

C64

■ While its gameplay is intact, this version is a missed opportunity. Critically, sound is absent, and the display appears to have been ported directly from the Spectrum, with the C64 struggling to move and scroll at any decent pace. With more effort, this could've been a fantastic wartime experience, and even the flag's gone, replaced with a simple counter.

AMSTRAD CPC

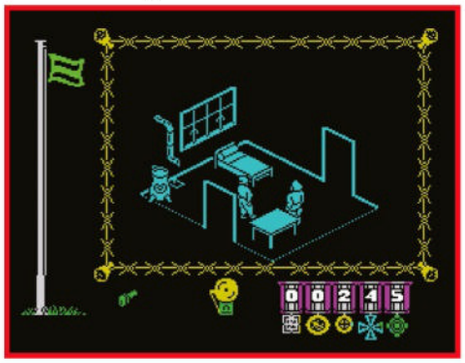
■ Sadly, another by-the-numbers Amstrad port from a Spectrum original. Presentation is mildly updated with a dash more colour, but like the Commodore 64 game, it chugs so slowly, getting across the camp yard is an adventure in itself. Another frustrating game that could have been so much more with a dedicated build.

PC

■ Although it doesn't add much to the Spectrum original, bar a few extra splashes of colour, this PC DOS port by Malcolm J Herd is spot-on. The scrolling is smooth, and the game moves at a decent speed, retaining all the playability of the Spectrum version of *The Great Escape*. At the time of writing, it is available on Steam from publisher Ziggurat.

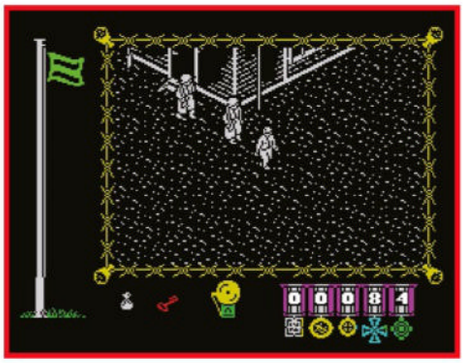
Papers Please

RETRO GAMER'S GUIDE TO A SUCCESSFUL ESCAPE



BEWARE THE CAMP COMMANDANT

■ The camp's boss patrols his domain randomly (including your room), checking not only the prisoners but his own guards. If you're innocently going about your day in the correct location, then he's no threat; however, he can see right through a disguise, so tread carefully when wearing the guard's uniform.



KEEP THE ROUTINE

■ Each prisoner has a set routine they must follow, and the player is no exception. Keep to roll call and meal times, and the guards will relax, especially if you leave the computer to handle your POW during these moments. Sneak off between these periods or at night to see what goodies you can find.

INCRIMINATING EVIDENCE

■ Once the player picks up an object, it becomes 'live' and discoverable by the guards. Leaving valuables in an area where they're likely to be found saps morale, but this can be avoided by stashing them in the tunnels under the camp or in the Red Cross parcel room.

Developer Q+A

RETRO GAMER DODGES THE COMMANDANT TO TALK TO DAVE THOMAS, DISASSEMBLER AND REMAKER OF THE GREAT ESCAPE

WHAT'S YOUR OVERRIDING MEMORY OF *THE GREAT ESCAPE*, DAVE?

I had *The Magnificent Seven* compilation, and *The Great Escape* was one of those games I just went back to again and again. I have this one core memory of being terrified when it was night-time, the spotlight sweeping around and having to hide [from the guards].

> "THE GREAT ESCAPE IS A KIND OF PRECURSOR TO ALL THAT EMERGENT GAMEPLAY STUFF WE SEE TODAY"

WHY DO YOU THINK IT'S SO SPECIAL?

There feels like there's a bit of magic in [*The Great Escape*], something spooky, and that there's some undercurrent. Most Spectrum games, what you see is what you get, but *The Great Escape* is a kind of precursor to all that emergent gameplay stuff we see today.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO DISASSEMBLE IT?

It's weird – I wouldn't normally go back to a game that was scary, but these were great memories. And the thing about the map in *The Great Escape*, is that there are always bits you can't get at, and it would drive me mad. So I wondered if there was more secret stuff and whether we really know all that we know about the game.

WHAT DID YOU DISCOVER?

Interestingly, there are maps of the game online that people have created, and they show the buildings going up. But actually, whoever did the maps had obviously filled in the blanks because the buildings are blank beyond what you can see, which makes sense, as you never see it on the screen.

ANY OTHER SURPRISES?

After I reverse-engineered the game, I rebuilt it and started running it on Mac OS. I still couldn't figure out how, when I was running two copies of the game side by side, they would run to a certain point, with the hero lockstepped, and then one would go left and the other right – and in-game events were occurring at different points, too. It was the identical game running side by side, so it should run the same. I discovered that *The Great Escape* uses a random number. A lot of the stuff is just tabular data, where it walks through the tables to say go here, go there, before at some point it needs a random number to decide which direction to take, and this is seeded separately. And this random number generator sits behind the menu screen, ticking away, so how long you spend in the menu screen influences how your game plays out.

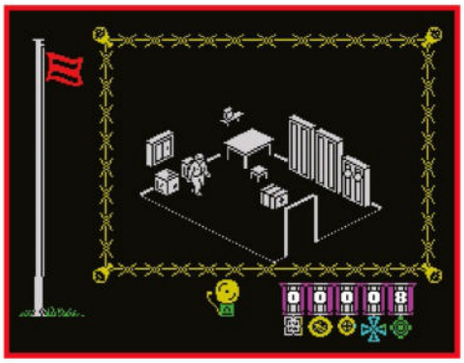
RETRO GAMER NEVER REALISED THERE ARE 15 GUARDS TO SIX PRISONERS…

Yeah, that's something I didn't realise either until years later! Although some of the guards are in fixed positions, like the one in the tower, and there are a bunch of prisoners who are permanently asleep in bed.

ARE YOU PLANNING ANY MORE ZX SPECTRUM DISASSEMBLIES?

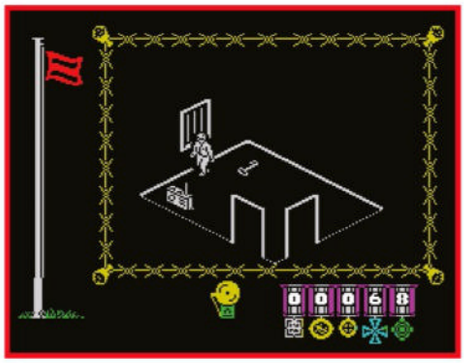
I've got a lot of *Chase HQ* done, actually, which is different as it has the concept of levels, whereas *The Great Escape* was all just one – the code is the game.

Our thanks to Dave for his time. To read his fascinating analysis of *The Great Escape*, go to his website, davespace.co.uk/the.great.escape/ Dave disassembled the game using Richard Dymond's Skoolkit: skoolkit.ca



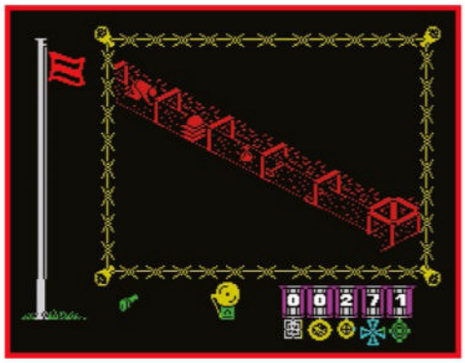
MORALE BOOST

■ Getting captured and sent to solitary confinement severely depletes morale. However, it can be raised by finding and using some crucial items as well as by eating and sleeping. Pilfering a Red Cross parcel also helps, so watch out for its daily appearance.



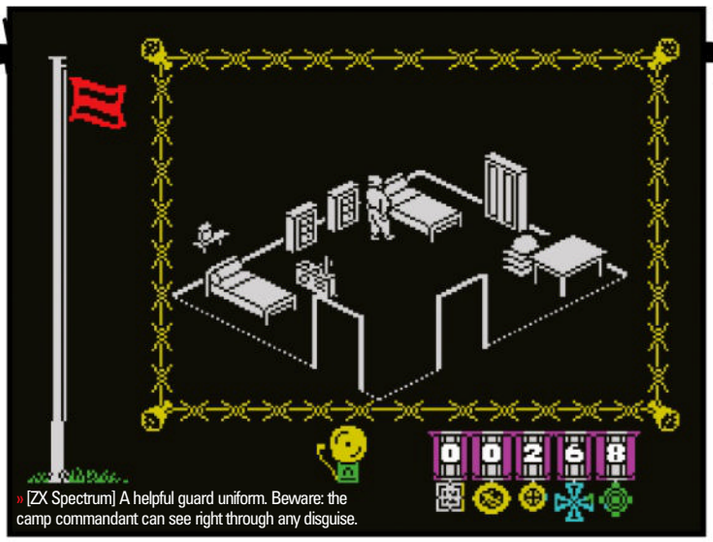
USEFUL ITEMS

■ Various useful items are helpfully located throughout the camp. These include keys, a guard uniform, a torch and wire cutters, the latter of which is essential for escape. Ignore the radio, though – it serves no purpose and you won't even get BBC Radio One on it.



GOING UNDERGROUND

■ Shifting the stove in the player's room reveals the entrance to a network of tunnels. Here, you can store contraband items and hide from the guards until the heat dies down. The torch aids navigation, but you'll also need a shovel to clear blockages.



» [ZX Spectrum] A helpful guard uniform. Beware: the camp commandant can see right through any disguise.

» [ZX Spectrum] Guards patrol the camp grounds.

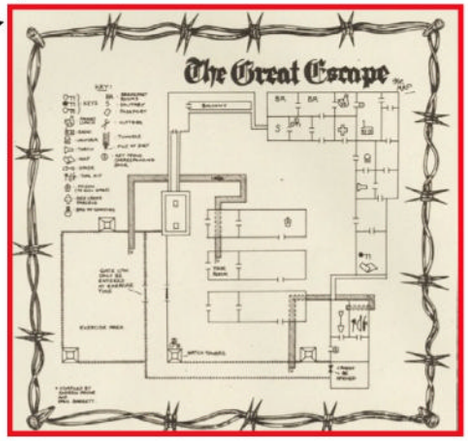
and solitary confinement. Beyond a set of locked doors is access to guard billets, meeting rooms and offices. Two tunnels, skillfully dug out by previous internees, sit beneath the camp and can be used to store contraband items, move around undetected or to simply skulk inside until the heat dies down. Conveniently, there's actually an entrance to one tunnel under the stove in the player's room.

Once you've sneaked away, the player can grab the numerous items left carelessly on the ground by the guards. Almost all are self-explanatory. The guard uniform allows the prisoner to explore forbidden areas without fear of being caught and sent straight to solitary confinement. However, the camp commandant sees right through this disguise and, whatever you do, don't escape with the uniform on – you'll be shot as a spy. Three coloured keys grant access to restricted rooms. A torch illuminates the dingy tunnels, while the shovel clears debris from them, and the lockpick, well, lets you pick locks – a useful tool, but one that takes an excruciatingly long time to use.

"DESPITE ITS ACTION-PACKED COVER, THE GREAT ESCAPE IS AN UNUSUALLY STEALTHY, NON-VIOLENT GAME THAT REQUIRES MUCH PATIENCE AND CUNNING"

Furthermore, each day brings a Red Cross relief parcel, delivered to a room in the north of the camp. Money, chocolate bars (helpful in getting fellow prisoners to cover for you at roll call) and the wire cutters – you won't be escaping without them – are some of the items considerately dropped by the charity. If you don't fancy dodging the hounds, you can even lace some of the camp provisions with poison, and there are two items essential once you've escaped. The compass prevents the escapee from getting lost and captured, while the papers allow them to pass unmolested through checkpoints. Cash, for bribery, works as well, and there are several endings to *The Great Escape* depending on what items you're carrying when you slip out of the camp. Get it wrong, and you'll soon be back in the cooler.

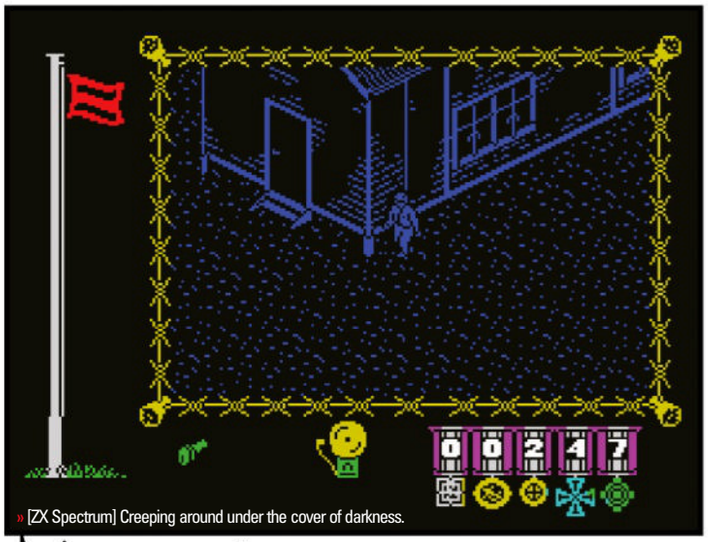
Despite its action-packed cover, *The Great Escape* is, for the ZX Spectrum, an unusually stealthy, non-violent game that requires much patience and cunning. Failing to turn up for roll call sends the camp on high alert, the guards spreading out to find the missing prisoner. The camp has several alert stages;



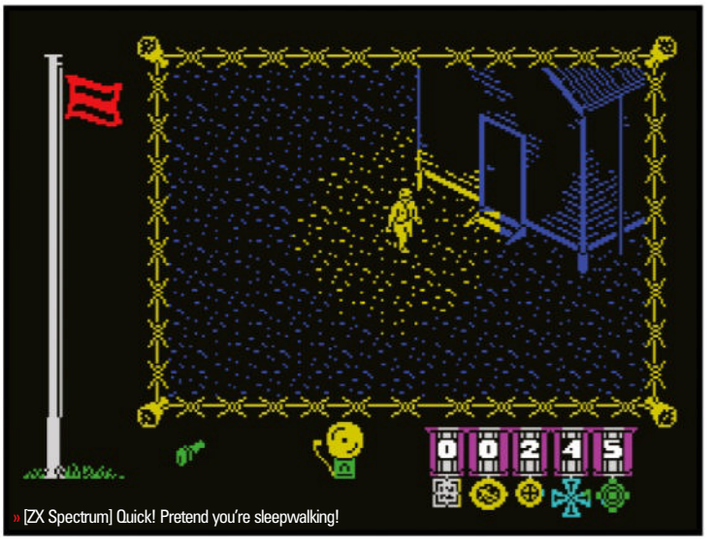
» A handy guide to the camp courtesy of *Crash* magazine.

» [ZX Spectrum] Get caught where you shouldn't be, and it's off for a spell in solitary confinement.

» [ZX Spectrum] Stand in line and be counted at roll call.

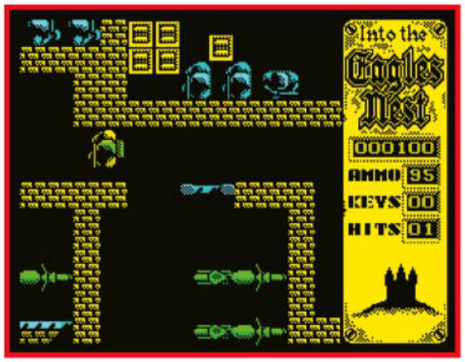


» [ZX Spectrum] Creeping around under the cover of darkness.



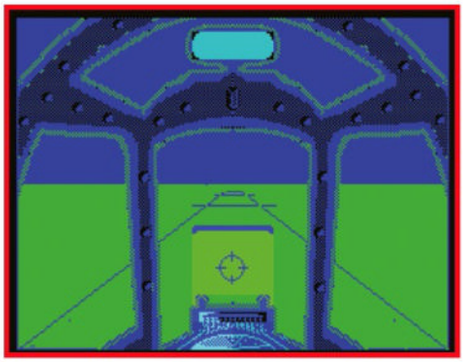
» [ZX Spectrum] Quick! Pretend you're sleepwalking!

What Is It Good For?



INTO THE EAGLE'S NEST

■ Or rather, *Gauntlet* in World War II. Capitalising on the popularity of the Atari coin-op (and its US Gold home conversion), this top-down arcade shooter places the player inside a German schloss. Your mission: rescue three fellow saboteurs, steal back antiquities and blow the place sky high.

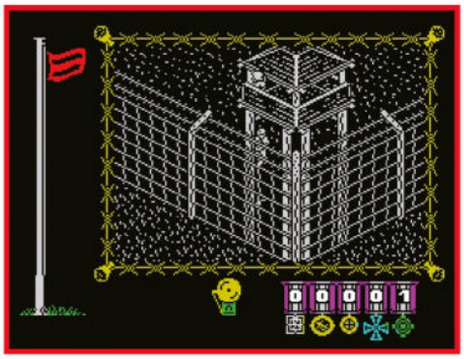


SPITFIRE 40

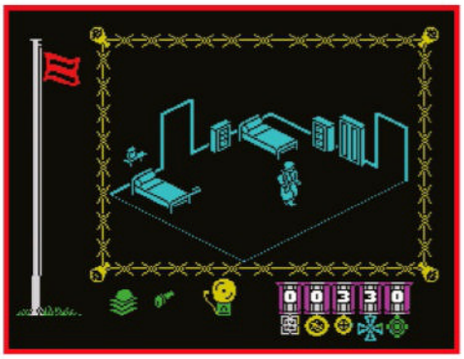
■ Mirrorsoft plunged Spectrum owners into the heat of the Battle Of Britain in 1985, taking to the skies to eliminate the Luftwaffe menace. Starting as a raw cadet on a training mission, you're soon flying wing-to-wing against the Germans – can you survive long enough to make group captain?

THE TRAIN: ESCAPE TO NORMANDY

■ This conversion of the Commodore 64 original puts the player in the shoes of a French Resistance fighter, determined to prevent a train-load of paintings reaching the Third Reich. Cover your colleague, strafe enemy fighters and hijack the train in this wartime adventure.



» [ZX Spectrum] The game sneakily hides a key here. A guard must have dropped it from the tower above.



» [ZX Spectrum] The guard uniform fools the grunts into thinking you're one of them.

» [ZX Spectrum] Escaping with the compass, papers or money ensures you don't endure a swift return to the camp.

continue to misbehave (or rather, get caught misbehaving) and the commandant tightens security, making escape even trickier. The fluttering flag changes colour to red whenever the POW is in a restricted area.

Oddly, despite its singular mission, there's a scoring system in *The Great Escape,* measured by a set of medals in the bottom-right of the screen. Picking up and using objects boosts this and your morale. Continually spamming the guard's uniform, for example, is a valuable way of improving both morale and your score. The flagpole on the left of the main display measures morale. Should the fluttering emblem reach the base of the pole, your POW's morale has sunk to rock bottom, leaving him resigned to spending the rest of the war imprisoned. The game doesn't end; the Spectrum takes control of the player as they morosely trudge from roll call to the canteen and bed, spirit crushed by the Third Reich.

Created by Ocean's developer partner Denton Designs – aka John Heap and Ally Noble – *The Great Escape* slipped out in time for the buoyant Christmas 1986 games market, arguably the finest time for Spectrum software. Reviews were astounding. "*The Great Escape* is definitely one of the best games I've ever seen on the Spectrum," exclaimed one *Crash* magazine reviewer in its stunning 96% review inside its December 1986 issue. The same month, *Sinclair User* scored the Ocean game a perfect five out of five, Andy Moss remarking, "*The Great Escape* is terrific fun to play, highly original and for once isn't just an exercise in wholesale slaughter." Encouraged – and no doubt a little surprised – by the reception, Ocean ordered Amstrad and Commodore 64 versions of its hit game, both released a few months later. Sadly, these weren't quite up to scratch, with technical issues hampering the gameplay, which was still appreciated in some quarters.

"THE GREAT ESCAPE SLIPPED OUT IN TIME FOR THE BUOYANT CHRISTMAS 1986 GAMES MARKET"

Two years later, Denton Designs used its experience with *The Great Escape* to help construct what many regard as the developer's finest hour, the 128K Spectrum game, *Where Time Stood Still*. But for most fans, its wartime prison epic, set in a converted castle on the cusp of the North Sea, is not only Denton's best, but one of the best Spectrum games of all time. ✱

RETRO GAMER'S OTHER FAVOURITE ZX SPECTRUM WORLD WAR II GAMES

ARNHEM

■ Programmer Robert T Smith specialised in deep yet playable strategy games, and this account of the ill-fated Allied attempt to end the war early is one of his finest. As the Allies, your mission is to capture the valuable bridges that dot the route to Germany – can you succeed, or will it be a bridge too far?

THEIR FINEST HOUR

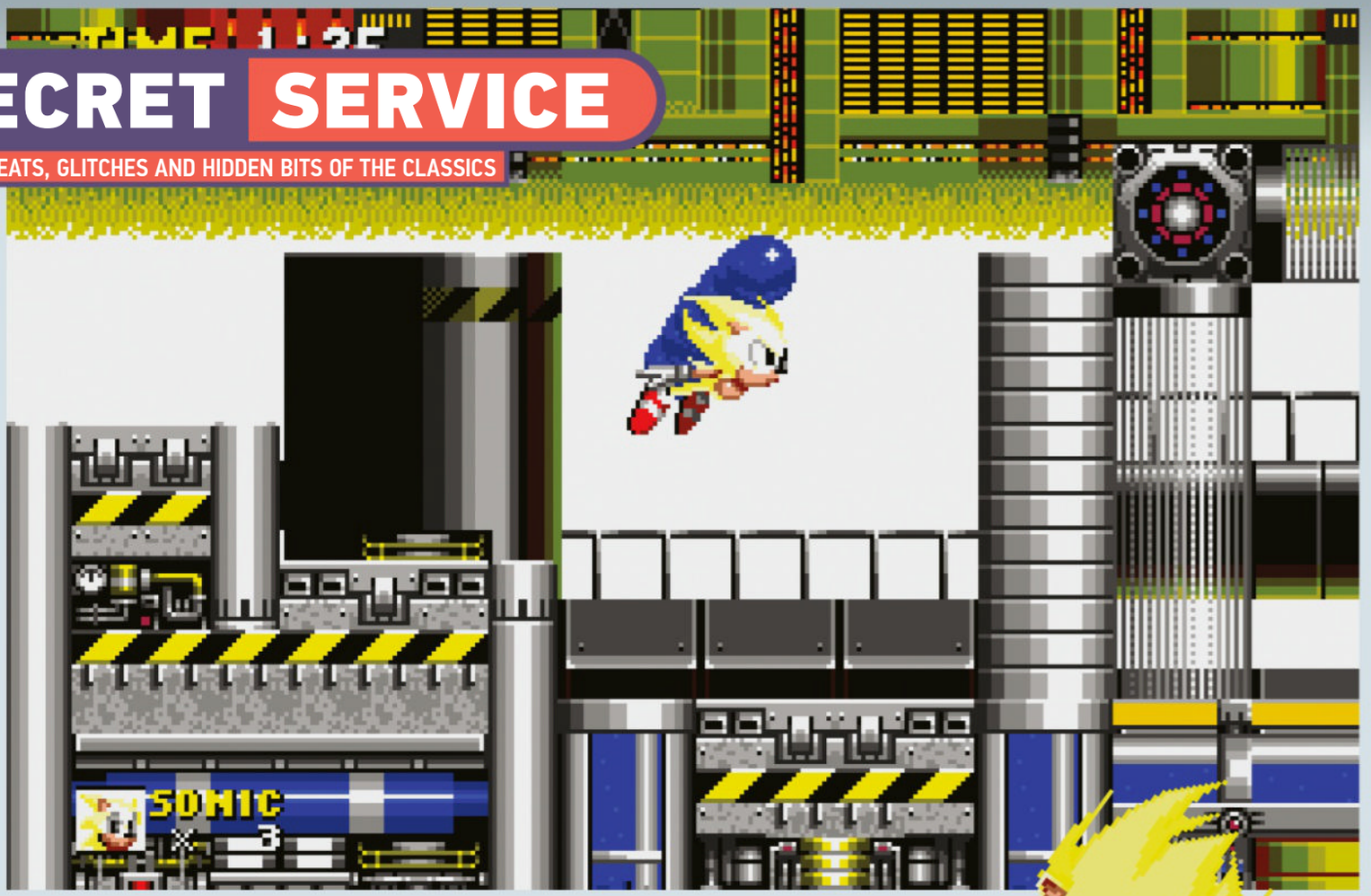
■ This companion piece to *Spitfire 40* is another tale of the daring RAF during the Battle Of Britain. This time, the player controls the entire British Fighter Command, planning their campaign and defending Blighty from the incessant German raids. *Their Finest Hour* boasts icon-driven gameplay and some lovely digitised pictures.

1942

■ We shift theatres to the Pacific in this shoot-'em-up from Elite, based on the Capcom arcade game. Based loosely on the pivotal Battle Of Midway, *1942* features a lone fighter battling across the atolls and islands of the Pacific. *1942*'s success spawned its own series and a host of military-themed clones.

SECRET SERVICE

THE CHEATS, GLITCHES AND HIDDEN BITS OF THE CLASSICS



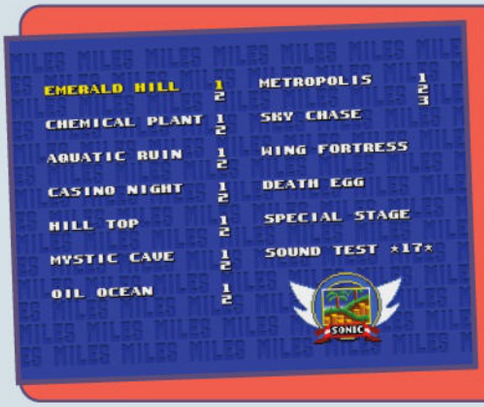
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE » **RELEASED:** 1992 » **CHEAT TYPE:** HIDDEN CHARACTER » **CHEAT COMPLEXITY:** MEDIUM

Collecting the Chaos Emeralds in the original *Sonic The Hedgehog* was a fun task, but one that only offered a slightly altered end sequence as a reward. Not so in the sequel – snagging all seven gems earns you the right to play as Super Sonic. Collect 50 rings and jump, and the heroic hedgehog will transform and start losing one ring per second, in exchange for super speed, high jumps and invincibility.

Of course, beating the special stages can be a tricky task, especially if Tails is tagging along and constantly losing your rings. If you're really stuck, activate the level select cheat, then play sounds 04, 01, 02 and 06 in sequence on the level select screen. This will work on the Mega Drive and most compilation versions. The remastered versions on mobile and in *Sonic Origins* let you do this in the regular sound test. If you're playing on an actual Mega Drive console, hitting the reset button will let you start over while keeping the Chaos Emeralds you've already collected – handy if you still want to earn it.

MORE CHEATS TO TRY OUT



LEVEL BEST

On the Mega Drive, go to the Options menu and play the following sounds: 19, 65, 09, 17. Hold **A** and press **Start** at the title screen for the level select menu. On remastered versions, press **Up**, **Up**, **Up**, **Down**, **Down**, **Down**, **Left**, **Right**, **Left**, **Right** at the title screen.

EXTRA CREDIT

On the Options screen, play the sounds 01, 01, 02, 04, then start a game by pressing **Start** with Player Select highlighted. You'll start with 14 continues, which is handy. Less handy is that in the Mega Drive version, a bug means you're stuck with the Oil Ocean Zone music.

EDITOR'S CHAIR

From the level select screen, play the sounds 01, 09, 09, 02, 01, 01, 02, 04 in sequence. Hold **A** and select your zone. Once you start, press **B** and you'll be able to move freely and add objects to the stage – press **A** to switch between objects, and **C** to place them.

TAILS WHO?

At the title screen, press **Up**, **Down**, **Down**, **Down**, **Up**, and Tails' name will be changed to Miles, or vice versa on Japanese consoles. In the remastered versions, press **Down** five times instead of three. His full name is Miles Prower, which is an admirable piece of wordplay.

DIGITAL DESOLATION

Sonic 2 had a turbulent development, with lots of scrapped concepts – the most infamous being Hidden Palace Zone. In the Mega Drive version, the Action Replay code **FFFE10:0800** takes you to what's left of the level – which isn't much, as most of it has been deleted.

RESTORED RUINS

Hidden Palace Zone was finished and hidden in the remastered versions as a secret stage. To find it, take the lower path in Mystic Cave Zone Act 2 until you reach a pulley-activated bridge over a pit. Jump into the pit and you'll find yourself in the formerly lost level.

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- **DEVELOPER:** TAITO
- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** LIGHTGUN SHOOTER

THE MAKING OF OPERATION WOLF

FEW ARCADE GAMES WERE AS IMPOSING, AS ICONIC OR AS INFLUENTIAL AS TAITO'S HIT COIN-OP THAT REDEFINED THE LIGHTGUN GENRE. IN THIS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW, THE GAME'S DIRECTOR TOSHIAKI KATO REVEALS THE UNTOLD STORY BEHIND THE MAKING OF THIS ARCADE MILESTONE

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

» [Arcade] Your attention is kindly dravvn to the bikini-clad lady running across the background. Do not shoot her!

The noisy RAT-A-TAT-TAT of *Operation Wolf*'s machine gun reverberated around arcade halls when the game was released in November 1987. The worldwide success of *Operation Wolf* similarly reverberated around the arcade industry, triggering a wave of copycat lightgun games from Sega, SNK, Namco and more. Taito itself would license a dozen home conversions and produce three arcade sequels, beginning with *Operation Thunderbolt* in 1988.

But for a game that was so ground-breaking and influential on its release, Taito did not set out to create, what it later coined, "The world's no.1 arcade game." In fact, director Toshiaki Kato reveals that the original plans were much more conservative. "*Operation Wolf* was a product designed with conversion from older game cabinets in mind," he tells us. "From the initial planning stages, we were intending to release a conversion kit for the previously released *NY Captor* [1985] and *Cycle Shooting* [1986], so the same lightgun system was adopted." The success of *Operation Wolf* blew those titles away, but it reminds us that the game was just a new take on the shooting

» [Arcade] Perspective is used to excellent effect, with enemies popping up in front of you as you're busy targeting those in the background.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

SPACE INVADERS
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1978

BUBBLE BOBBLE
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1986

CHASE HQ (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: ARCADE
RELEASED: 1988

» Toshiaki Kato joined Taito in the late-Seventies, straight out of university. He served as *Operation Wolf*'s director.

gallery games that had been making a din in arcades for decades.

Kato was well aware of the possibilities, and the practicalities of coin-op development, having joined the industry in the late-Seventies and working on both the hardware and software sides. "I joined Pacific Manufacturing, a subsidiary of Taito, right after the release of *Space Invaders* in 1978," he says. "The development department was led by Mr [Tomohiro] Nishikado, the creator of *Space Invaders*. Pacific Manufacturing was responsible for development and production, rather than Taito itself. We did everything by hand, including hardware design, software development and maintenance. I was involved in software development for *Astro Zone* and *Tri-Attacker* [both 1980], as well as assisting with *Space Cruiser* [1981]. Then, after moving to the Osaka Research And Development office, I worked as a hardware engineer on *Buggy Challenge* [1984] and *Wyvern F-0* [1985]. However, it was determined that working on hardware development alone was inefficient, so I shifted focus to software, working on *Kick And Run* [1986] before moving on to *Operation Wolf*. By this time, software development was being done using Hewlett-Packard workstations."

> "WHEN THE DEVELOPMENT STARTED, I WAS WORKING ON IT ALONE FOR ABOUT THREE TO FOUR MONTHS"
> **TOSHIAKI KATO**

The crack team Taito assembled to kick off the development was made up of… Mr Kato himself. "The programmers at Osaka R&D were busy with the driving game *Full Throttle*, so when the development started, I was working on it alone for about three to four months. I later received support from another staff member. I've worked on numerous other games besides *Operation Wolf*, but I was fortunate in that I started working on it alone, which allowed me to put a lot of effort into the enemy control system and other aspects, giving me some leeway in the work. This allowed me to spend a significant amount of time on the final balancing. I think the overall quality of the game is thanks to that." He is keen to point out that, even when the team was bolstered, there was still a lot of development freedom. "At that time, programmers didn't really listen to the designers and would add their own specifications and have the artists create new characters as they saw fit while developing the game."

» [Arcade] The random 'intermission' shoot-outs that pop up between stages are a good opportunity to stock up on vital supplies.

What helped distinguish *Operation Wolf* from earlier lightgun games, in terms of graphics *and* gameplay, was the move from the Z80 CPU to a powerful new 68000-based system. The difference it made was night and day. "The new hardware allowed for a much greater number of sprites on-screen compared to the previous hardware, and allowed for the creation of large characters," says Kato "Taking advantage of this feature, the game designer created a specification with a sense of realism that had not been seen before. In traditional shooting gallery gun games, the focus was on accuracy, and the gameplay was straightforward. However,

» [Arcade] "I think the bombs that can be used when you're in trouble were a new feature not seen in the genre before," says Mr Kato. Well, we can't recall any earlier examples.

» [Arcade] You must protect the hostages in the final two stages. Hit them and they'll damn you to hell.

» [Arcade] At the end of the Jungle stage you face a dastardly mini-boss who uses a local as a human shield.

in *Operation Wolf*, we sought to create a sense of realism that would give players a real adrenaline rush. So, rather than simply focussing on accurate shooting, we looked to create the exhilaration of using a real machine gun to cut a swath through the enemies. We also aimed to create a game that prioritised tension and immersion, like being part of a movie, with large, realistic characters in the style of American comics, rather than comical characters."

The influence of Western media was clear and quite deliberate. "In previous shooting games, the characters were comical and cute, but overseas sales staff complained that such characters would not sell overseas. It cannot be denied that we were conscious of the overseas market," Kato admits. The team was also keenly aware of American action cinema, including two 1985 movies in particular. "From the initial draft, I think *Commando* had a strong influence on the game designer. In terms of the worldview, I think it's more like *Rambo*, so he probably had both movies in mind."

For players embodying their inner John Matrix or John Rambo, a huge draw was the highly detailed character graphics. They actually looked like flesh and blood enemies, especially when they popped up in your personal space. Kato reveals that these depictions were drawn by the game's designer, who was a keen artist well versed in the American comic style. "He drew the main characters and images used in the interludes. He taught the other artists how to

OPERATIONAL EXCH

DON'T SPRAY AND PRAY

It's tempting at times, especially when the screen is swarming with enemies, but avoid holding down the trigger like a crazed John Rambo. Conserve your ammo by taking out enemies in controlled bursts – prioritising those in the foreground and working back.

CONSERVE YOUR ROCKETS

Bullets are limited, rockets even more so. You begin the game with just five, so you must use them wisely. Save them for helicopters, which are bullet sponges, taking ten hits to destroy. Ideally, try and get two (or even three) helicopters lined up for maximum return.

SHOOT THOSE LOVELY COCONUTS

You can find ammo hidden behind crates, but most bonus items are more creatively hidden. For example, in the Jungle stage, shoot the coconuts to earn more than milk. Elsewhere, shooting the pigs, chickens and eagles that foolishly enter the screen will give you goodies.

AIM FOR THE HEAD

In the final two stages you will encounter a super-soldier who's sporting a blond flattop and toting an M60. Crucially, he's wearing a bulletproof vest, so don't waste your ammo on his body. Instead, aim directly for his face and a couple of well-placed shots will take him out.

apply comic-book-style shadows and tones, but since the art style was so different from the small, comical characters they had been drawing up to that point, it was tough going at first," Kato points out. "Additionally, we'd developed a dedicated tool for character creation at Taito, enabling automatic conversion of multiple object files into data formats compatible with our various system boards. The tool also allowed for animation previews, so once the artists had the art style perfected, there were no further issues. The tool's interface featured an arcade-style joystick and numerous buttons assigned to various functions. It was a thing of wonder when they got up to speed with the art on that machine."

With the gameplay and the pixels in place, the development soon reached the fine-tuning phase. Kato remembers this stage well, beginning with tweaks to the process which registered the lightgun's position. "When firing, the screen flashes white to detect the scanlines, but the white screen proved to be too much of a strain on the eyes and caused issues with alignment, so we adjusted it with a blue tint," he explains. "The character animations were working as instructed, but how they were displayed, their timing, and the combinations of characters were all adjusted during development. Enemies didn't appear in predetermined patterns defined in a table, but rather incorporated random elements. Additionally, the civilian characters, who you're meant to avoid shooting, were initially very difficult to distinguish from the enemies, so we requested that the character designer make them clearly identifiable – which is how we ended up with characters like the bikini-clad women." Tuning the game for extended periods did present Kato with an occupational hazard. "When testing the game with a gun controller, the vibration of the gun felt really good, but it put a strain on my hands, making coding on the keyboard difficult afterwards!"

> **"WE SOUGHT TO CREATE A SENSE OF REALISM THAT WOULD GIVE PLAYERS A REAL ADRENALINE RUSH"**
> **TOSHIAKI KATO**

As the game neared completion, attention was turned to the international release. "Most Japanese developers were unaware of overseas trends and preferences, so the overseas sales staff's advice was taken as gospel," explains Kato. These recommendations resulted in one significant change, which ultimately dumbed-down the team's vision. "The original plan was to have a strategic element where players could choose stages, with the addition of random events to keep them entertained. However, when balancing the game for the international markets, the overseas sales staff advised us that stage selection would not go down well, and we should lock the order of stages. As a result, only the Japanese version was released with

ELLENCE

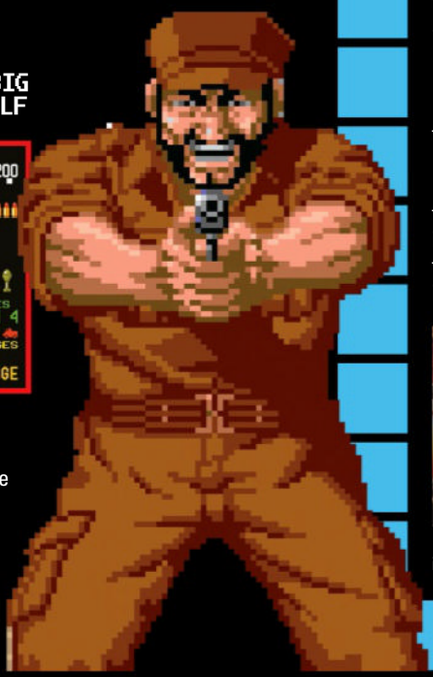
HOW TO BE A BIG BAD WOLF

TRY USING DELAY TACTICS

■ At the end of a stage, if you're low on ammo but fairly healthy, leave a single enemy alive on the screen. Until you defeat them, the stage will continue, and you'll be rewarded with plenty of bonus ammo. When your supply is topped up, pop the enemy and move on.

PROTECT THE HOSTAGES

■ The aim of the game is to provide the hostages with safe passage on the Concentration Camp and Airport stages. This means not shooting them accidentally, of course, but also protecting them from the knife-wielding assassins who try to stab them in the back.



DEPLOYING THE CS PACK

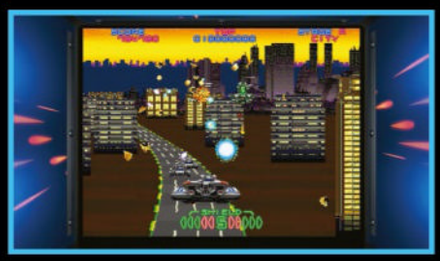
WHEN OPERATION NIGHT STRIKERS HEADS HOME...

■ Available alongside *Operation Night Strikers* is the *CS Pack*. The paid DLC features various home conversions of the four main games, including the NES/Famicom and Master System versions of *Operation Wolf*. The two versions are quite similar, although the Sega game is more polished, and is probably the best of all the 8-bit ports that were released. Also included is the 1994 SNES version of *Operation Thunderbolt*, which was originally only released in the United States and adds a choice of six playable characters, plus a non-linear mission structure. The 1992 Master System version of *Space Gun* and the 1993 Mega-CD version of *Night Striker* round out the package.

As you'd expect from M2, the standard of emulation is excellent. It's a shame there are no home-computer conversions included, but maybe that will change in future collections. Speaking on that very subject, M2 CEO Naoki Horii tells us, "Once we've ported from a certain platform a number of times, it's relatively easy to get a game from that platform running, so my interest lies in including European computer versions such as the Commodore 64. Each version has its own unique character, so I feel that there's both meaning and significance in porting them."

» [Switch] The Master System version of *Operation Wolf* is one of the highlights of the *CS Pack*.

» [Switch] All of the included games feature a range of borders and display options.



» [Switch] *Night Striker* isn't as well known outside of Japan. It's an overlooked gem of a game.

CONVERSION INTEL

YUJIRO YAMAMOTO OF M2 AND YUICHI TOYAMA OF TAITO TALK OPERATION NIGHT STRIKERS

» Yujiro Yamamoto oversaw the *Operation Night Strikers* project at M2.

» Yuichi Toyama is a producer at Taito, who worked alongside the M2 team.

"WE HAD TO COME UP WITH NEW SPECIFICATIONS FROM SCRATCH..." YUJIRO YAMAMOTO

***OPERATION NIGHT STRIKERS* INCLUDES *OPERATION WOLF* PLUS OTHER LIGHTGUN GAMES. WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WHEN PORTING THESE TITLES?**

Yujiro Yamamoto: Without a doubt, the biggest problem we faced was the controls. Most of the games M2 has ported so far have used joysticks and buttons, but this know-how was useless when it came to working with games where the controller itself was unique. This meant we had to come up with new specifications from scratch. Fortunately, the Nintendo Switch has gyro controls, so we were able to achieve controls as close as possible to the original gun controller. Additionally, there are two other methods – mouse controls and stick controls – allowing users to find what works for them. During development, a thought crossed my mind several times, "If only this project had come up 15 years ago when the Wii Remote and PlayStation Move were available…"

WHICH QUALITY-OF-LIFE FEATURES DO YOU THINK GAMERS WILL APPRECIATE MOST?

YY: We have added various elements, but I think the most important one is the Easy Mode in the gun games. The original versions of those titles are all very difficult, and even top players find it difficult to finish them without continuing. M2 prides itself on the high quality of its ports, but no matter how high the quality, if the game isn't fun to play, it means very little. Therefore, we've included a newly adjusted mode that greatly increases the player's ability and allows them to progress smoothly.

Yuichi Toyama: Of the four titles, *Night Striker* is the most popular in Japan. There are special strategies such as 'pacifist' where you play without shooting any enemies, and M2 has added gadgets which display internal parameters for when playing like this. I think Japanese players will be happy, and perhaps overseas players will gain a new appreciation for the game?

THE COMPILATION FEATURES THE PREVIOUSLY UNSEEN EU VERSION OF NIGHT STRIKER. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

YY: This was discovered by chance when backing up the ROM data stored in Taito's warehouse. Even the arcade development team members who were interviewed were unaware of its existence, so at first it was assumed to be a development build. However, upon reviewing the documents, it was discovered that it was a project carried out by a very small team. Although this title is not being published as an M2 *ShotTriggers* game, our policy is to include overseas versions and minor versions whenever possible, so we proposed to Taito that it be incorporated in the release. By the way, one of the reasons for the popularity of *Night Striker* in Japan is its music, but in the European version, the music for stages had been removed and replaced with additional sound effects.

YT: The original development staff revealed that the stage background music was removed at the request of Taito's European staff. The composer was very disappointed to have his work removed.

DID THE HOME CONVERSIONS INCLUDED AS DLC POSE ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS?

YY: If we'd only supported standard game pads, the console ports would have been easy to include, but we felt we needed to go the extra mile for the DLC, so we did our best to replicate the special controllers as much as we could. In particular, the SMS Light Phaser and SNES Super Scope had different signal processing from the arcade original, making the console adaptations more challenging. While most players at the time likely used standard game pads, I hope you'll take the opportunity to experience how unique those special controllers felt back then.

» [Master System] The excellent Sega 8-bit version arrived late, in 1990. It was worth the wait.

the stage-select feature." In addition, this alteration forced a change to the game's conclusion, where the player is appraised by the US President. In the Japanese version there are four alternative endings, which are chosen depending on how many stages you successfully clear. Whereas in the international version, there are just two endings – the President shakes your hand if you rescue at least one hostage, or shakes his fist if all of the hostages perish, hollering, "We won't ask *you* again!" Speaking about the decision to include alternative endings, Kato says, "If the player fails, you want to encourage them to play again and successfully finish the game, otherwise the game will not generate income. I think it's natural to have multiple endings for a game, which are based on skill, rather than an ending which is always the same."

The 'bad' ending is another example of the humour that's present in the game. There are the aforementioned bikini beach babes, who've somehow taken a sharp left turn into a warzone. Elsewhere, if you accidentally shoot a hostage, they grow a pair of angel wings and ascend to the heavens while berating your shooting skills. Yet these moments of light relief were overshadowed by the press reaction to the game's body count. On release, most UK press reviews mentioned the level of violence on display. "*Operation Wolf*

» [NES] Despite suffering from flickery sprites, the NES version was pretty good – and included support for the Zapper.

» [Arcade] Your route through the game. In the Japanese version, you get to choose which of the first four stages you tackle.

» [Arcade] It's funny how such small things can lodge in the memory, like the overly dramatic pause between 'finished' and 'here' on the game over screen.

» [Arcade] There's a strong whiff of *Rambo* at the end of the game where you take on an enemy gunship.

» [Arcade] Taito released a quick-fire sequel, *Operation Thunderbolt*, in 1988. It featured 'into-the-screen' stages, co-op play and an even greater body count.

takes realism a little too far…" opined *ACE* magazine. "Sheer, unadulterated violence is the main theme in *Operation Wolf*," wrote *CVG*. "The action is fast and furious, not to mention violent and tasteless," commented *Your Sinclair*. In response, Kato reveals that the team didn't intentionally set out to make an excessive game. "At the time, we weren't too concerned about pushing the limits, so much as being focussed on providing the players, who were paying to play, with enjoyment. Regarding overseas reactions, there may have been reports to upper management, but I don't think detailed information reached the development team. There were no requests for revisions."

As is usually the case, the clones that followed – such as SNK's *Mechanized Attack* (1989), Sega's *Line Of Fire* (1989) and Namco's *Steel Gunner* (1990) – were even more over the top. SNK's *Beast Busters* (1990) and Taito's own *Space Gun* (1990), which in a parallel world would have been called *Operation Xenomorph*, both added blood and guts to the mix and made *Operation Wolf* look decidedly tame in comparison. Kato is not surprised by all the clones that hit the market. "Games have always evolved by incorporating unique ideas from other games. In that sense, I think it's expected for similar games to appear."

Echoing *Operation Wolf*'s arcade success, the game was a hit on multiple home systems. Ocean Software brought the game to home computers, and the results were generally very good, with the ST and Amiga versions (developed by Ocean France) being the standouts. It was also converted to a number of consoles, including the NES, Master System and PC Engine (interestingly, the PC Engine version was the only one to copy *Operation Thunderbolt*'s USP and offer support for co-op play). The NES and Master System versions were developed by Taito, but Kato and his team were not involved with them. "Back then, the arcade development teams and the console development teams were basically separate departments," he says. "The arcade team rarely had any involvement in the ports. Although there was some sharing of development materials and enquiries about certain specifications, our focus was on developing for the arcade, so porting to home consoles was mostly left to the console team."

> **"THE VIBRATION OF THE GUN FELT REALLY GOOD, BUT IT PUT A STRAIN ON MY HANDS, MAKING CODING ON THE KEYBOARD DIFFICULT!"**
> **TOSHIAKI KATO**

Now, as *Operation Wolf* approaches its 40th anniversary, the game heads home once more as part of Taito's *Operation Night Strikers*. This compilation, currently available on Steam and Switch, also features three more Taito arcade titles – *Operation Thunderbolt*, *Space Gun* and *Night Striker*. Developed by M2, it delivers faithful versions of each game, plus some welcome quality-of-life features (see **RG**'s review in last month's issue).

Kato admits to being pleased with the positive reaction to the release, and of course he's particularly happy that trigger-happy players are revisiting *Operation Wolf*. "I am hugely grateful that there are still fans out there. At the time, arcade game development was mainly carried out by small teams over short periods of time, and the developers were deeply immersed in the games, putting a lot of thought and passion into them, with the aim of creating something that they themselves could enjoy. As a developer, nothing makes me happier than fans of the game coming back and finding a nostalgic and fun experience. I sincerely hope they find it enjoyable."

Special thanks to James Wragg, Bryan McPhail and, of course, Toshiaki Kato for sharing his memories.

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(ONE-TIME USE)

Wing Commander

CHRIS ROBERTS DOES STAR WARS

» PC » 1990 » ORIGIN SYSTEMS

I've mentioned elsewhere in this issue about my love of *Star Wars,* so it makes sense to mention *Wing Commander* as well. On its release in 1990, Chris Roberts' ambitious sci-fi space opera was the closest I could get to reliving the epic space battles of George Lucas' iconic trilogy. *X-Wing* hadn't even been conceived, and the *Star Wars* arcade game, while still fun, wasn't exactly new by this point, so *Wing Commander* felt revolutionary at the start of the Nineties.

Rightly acclaimed on release for its striking visuals, rich story and comprehensive game world, *Wing Commander* felt like no other space game I'd played and easily scratched an itch for *Star Wars*-styled space fighting. Although it's a simulator, *Wing Commander* is more focussed on arcade spills and thrills, so while there was still a fair amount to keep track of, it never felt intimidating like the numerous Amiga flight simulators I'd tried to get into at the time.

Although the actual missions in *Wing Commander* are rather basic in their structure by today's standards, they felt really involved on release and it really felt like you were climbing up the ranks as you downed Kilrathi ships and tried to keep your wingman alive. Many of the missions have multiple objectives and you can often tackle objectives in any order you choose, which adds to the game's impressive sense of immersion. New ships also become available as you progress, while the game's open-ended story feels like there's everything to play for, as a better performance in-game leads to better rewards.

Wing Commander was predictably a huge success and led to numerous sequels and conversions including the Amiga and SNES, both of which I never liked as much as the PC original. In a nice case of coming full circle, the later games even featured Mark Hamill, who had been such an integral part of the *Star Wars* films. What more could a *Star Wars*-obsessed fan ask for? ✱

THE HISTORY OF Simon the Sorcerer

AS THE TEENAGED WIZARD DUSTS OFF HIS HAT AND ROBE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN 15 YEARS, WE CAST OUR MINDS BACK TO 1993 AND LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF ONE OF BRITAIN'S MOST ENDURING ADVENTURE GAME SERIES, AND MEET THE PEOPLE WHO MADE THE MAGIC HAPPEN...

WORDS BY ASHLEY DAY

» Simon Woodroffe created the *Simon The Sorcerer* series and developed the first three games. He has since held a number of distinguished positions at Midway, Rare and now Epic.

» Andrew Brazier was co-designer on *Simon The Sorcerer 3D* and now teaches game design and digital art.

» Stefan Hoffmann was game designer on *Simon The Sorcerer 4* and is now head of studio at German game developer Promotion Software.

Back in the early Nineties, the point-and-click adventure genre was dominated by giant American companies like Sierra and Lucasarts, but over in the UK, a handful of tiny studios were giving their all to compete with the big boys. One such developer was the family run Adventure Soft, led by Mike Woodroffe and his son Simon, out of Sutton Coldfield. The pair created a number of ambitious adventures over the years but their biggest hit by far was *Simon The Sorcerer*, a *Monkey Island*-like game starring a sarcastic teenager, magically transported to a comedic fairytale world by the wizard Calypso in the hope of defeating the evil Sordid.

The first game released in 1993 for Amiga and PC, and was instantly likeable thanks to its stunning pixel-art visuals and hand-painted backgrounds. The CD-ROM release also featured full voice acting, which was relatively unusual for the time, and starred Chris Barrie (*Red Dwarf*, *The Brittas Empire*) whose nasal tone was a perfect match for Simon Woodroffe's distinctly British humour, inspired by the likes of *Blackadder* and *The Young Ones*.

Speaking to *games™* magazine in 2009, Simon explained his attempt to make *Simon The Sorcerer* feel distinct, and where he felt it best not to change the formula. "There was a conscious effort to be very 'British' – to help set ourselves apart from the smarter humour of *Monkey Island* – which was obviously a huge consideration when we were creating Simon. They had the interface and mechanics working perfectly and we didn't try to change them – what was the point – we knew our limitations well and reinventing the wheel wasn't on our agenda."

» [Amiga] *Simon The Sorcerer* occasionally features anachronistic items and objects that don't belong in a fantasy world; a trait that only increased with the sequels.

» [Amiga] The text interface felt a little old fashioned even by 1993, but it worked. It would be streamlined with icons from the second game onward.

» [Amiga] Like most great adventure games, there's always plenty of interesting items to use.

» Adventure Soft were so proud of their voice acting that they mentioned the "Talkie" soundtrack no less than four times on the CD32 box!

» Johanna Janiszewski designed *Simon The Sorcerer: Who'd Even Want Contact?* and is now CEO of Tiny Crocodile Studios.

» Dave McCabe was narrative designer on the cancelled *Between Worlds* and later went on to write *Darkside Detective* and the forthcoming *The Séance Of Blake Manor.*

» Massy Calamai, founder of Smallthing Studios and developer of this year's *Simon The Sorcerer Origins.*

Taking everything that worked well about the *Monkey Island* games, transposing it to a fantasy setting and adding British humour, turned out to be a smart move. The game was absorbing to play, thanks in part to some incredible background art, drawn by the traditional artists Mike Woodroffe had recruited from outside the games industry, but also thanks to its memorable characters… a Troll forming a picket-line to stop three billygoats from crossing his bridge, a lonely and pathetic Swampling who practically takes you hostage until you've held down his revolting swamp stew, a famished group of Woodworm so small you can't see them; but loud enough in their complaining that they can't be missed. Each situation wasn't just a recipe for good comedy, it created an opportunity for great puzzle solving too, and made you want to venture deeper into the world just to see what was around the next corner.

Simon The Sorcerer received stellar reviews from the gaming press at the time. *The One Amiga* lavished four pages in its review, showing off its incredible screenshots and slapping a hearty 89% score on the end, while *Amiga Format* praised the "mouth-watering visuals, cutesy characters and complex puzzles', and in his *CU Amiga* review of the fully voiced CD32 version, Dean Evans called it "a slick, humorous and superbly drawn fantasy". *Simon The Sorcerer* was so well received that it shifted more than an estimated half-a-million copies. Not bad at all for a tiny studio that didn't even have an office at the time. A sequel was all but assured…

With the Amiga's commercial lifespan coming to an end in 1995, *Simon The Sorcerer II: The Lion, The Wizard And The Wardrobe* ditched Commodore's beloved computer and released exclusively for the PC. And that wasn't the only big change – Chris Barrie departed the role to be replaced by the less well-known and, let's be honest, not quite as good Brian Bowles.

Despite the changes, *Simon The Sorcerer II* retained many of the first game's strengths, particularly its stunning pixel art, beautiful backgrounds, witty story and quirky characters. This time around, Simon is whisked back into the fantasy world to take on Sordid yet again, meets a new love interest in the form of Calypso's granddaughter Alix and even gets

» [Amiga] The series is never afraid to make jokes that break the fourth wall.

» [Amiga] *Simon 2* featured a slightly more cartoony style but the pixel art remained at an impeccably high standard.

3000% INTEREST
LORN Co
1 Well this conversation's off to a flying start...
2 It was nice not talking to you. Bye.
3 So... You're a jester, are you?
4 Nice weather we're having.

» [Amiga] As with the original game, *Simon The Sorcerer 2* features plenty of interesting characters.

to spend some time on a pirate ship, much like his spiritual influence. A few old characters return, most notably Swampy who has now opened his own MucSwamplings fast food restaurant, while a few new characters made their debut too. Discovering that the Three Bears have been robbed and ransacked by a criminal Goldilocks, and have now surrounded their home with barbed wire and security cameras, is a particular highlight.

While *Simon II* is, on the whole, another great adventure, it does have some issues. Some of the jokes and character depictions cross the line of political correctness too often, while Brian Bowles' voice acting struggles to strike the right tone, turning what felt like sarcastic charm in the first game into a characterisation that now felt overly cruel or demeaning at times.

Perhaps some of the drawbacks stemmed from the change in development approach, as Simon explained to *games™* in 2009. "For *Simon 1*, we essentially had a lot of interesting character designs, and a fairytale world and we had to wrap puzzles and scripts around them to fit. I think, later on in the game, it was more planned first and then created to some kind of spec – and certainly the sequel was created in this way. There was less room for creativity around the team and I think the game suffered for it. It was more consistent, but that made it less appealing."

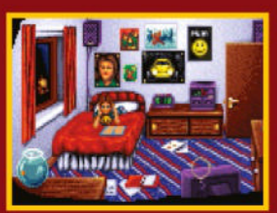
Criticisms aside, *Simon The Sorcerer II* was generally liked by fans and helped propel the series to over one million sales, and since the story ended on a big cliffhanger – with Simon trapped in Sordid's body and Sordid rampaging around in Simon's body – those fans were keen to see what would happen next. Unfortunately, they would have to wait a spell.

MAGIC MOMENTS

SOME MEMORABLE BITS FROM THE FIRST, AND BEST, SIMON THE SORCERER

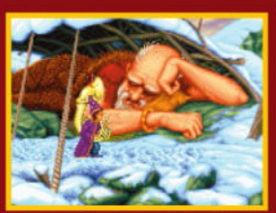
FEELING IDLE

■ Simon's idle animation sees him rock out to his Walkman. *Simon The Sorcerer Origins* will tell us what he was listening to.



THE REAL SIMON

■ The intro features a rare glimpse of Simon's teenage life in the real world. Expect to see more of this in the next game.



A GIANT PROBLEM

■ Blasting your sousaphone at this sleeping giant isn't quite loud enough to wake him, but it will make him stir and knock down that tree.

PARTY OF ONE

■ At the kingdom's loneliest birthday party with the swampling and his homemade swamp stew. Eww, yuck!

HAIR-RAISING STUFF

■ Climbing all they way up to meet Rapunzel turns out not to be worth the effort. She's (quite literally) a bit of a pig.

Adventure Soft's next game was 1997's *The Feeble Files*, a science fiction adventure that starred another *Red Dwarf* cast member, Robert Llewellyn, as a little green man in a more futuristic adventure that traded pixel art for pre-rendered polygons. *Simon The Sorcerer 3* was intended to use this same style and was fully designed before it was abandoned due to a lack of funding. "We needed, I think, about 100 grand to finish the 2D *Simon 3* but nobody would give it to us," Simon told *games™*. "We were told repeatedly that 2D was dead – nothing would sell in 2D – eventually someone was prepared to throw a lot more down for us to redo it in 3D. We really fucked that up of course."

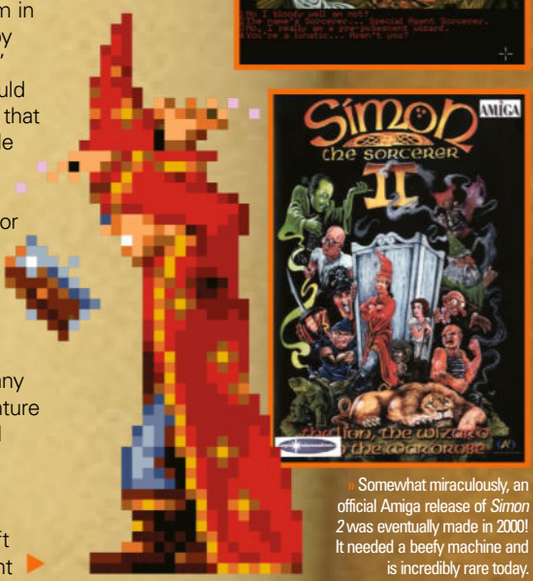
With funding secured from Hasbro, the team started work on the brand-new *Simon The Sorcerer 3D*, not just redoing the visuals in a brand-new engine but completely rewriting the story, dialogue and puzzles in just nine months. It's probably the most magical thing about the series that this game was finished and playable at all.

"It was our first real-time 3D game so there was a steep learning curve," says Andrew Brazier, co-designer of *Simon The Sorcerer 3D*. "It's not just the new art pipeline, it's the knock-on considerations of game design as well. If the game's 2D then it's fine to have a sprawling forest location – that's not going to be possible if the game is real-time 3D. Not then at least. At the same time, we were working with one remote programmer, and a couple of remote artists, and in the days before decent speed broadband, getting data from place to place was a nightmare."

Despite the development difficulties, *Simon The Sorcerer 3D* still features some witty humour, great characters and excellent puzzles. It has it where it counts and is generally more fun than its reputation would have you believe. It also benefits from some new ideas made possible by the third dimension. Simon can now crawl, creating opportunities for new environmental puzzles, and can look and aim in first-person. "We were all hugely inspired by both *Super Mario 64* and *Ocarina Of Time*," says Andrew, "which showed just what could be achieved with a real-time 3D world, and that encouraged us to explore what was possible with an adventure game. A little too much, perhaps, as in many instances the ambition was there but we just didn't have the time or budget to implement the vision fully."

Sadly, just as the team were nearing the end of development, disaster struck as Hasbro backed out of publishing the game. This was the early Noughties and adventure games just weren't fashionable any more. Lucasarts had closed down its adventure division in the post-*Phantom Menace* world of *Star Wars* mania, while the technological advancements in PC gaming meant players were way more interested in first-person shooters or MMOs. Adventure Soft was left with no option but to complete development ▶

» [Amiga] Fantasy burgers never ever look like the thing that's being advertised.



» Somewhat miraculously, an official Amiga release of *Simon 2* was eventually made in 2000! It needed a beefy machine and is incredibly rare today.

TRUFFLE SEARCHING

■ Still, you can later use the pig to eat through a truffle door, so it's not a complete waste of time climbing up that rope made of hair.

DEEP UNDERCOVER

■ Simon dons a fake beard in order to gain entry to a cave that is inhabited by a load of dwarves. That'll fool 'em! Hopefully!

SHRINKY DINK

■ Simon shrinks down to miniature size and explores the world with a whole new perspective. It's Honey I Shrunk The Simon!

THE WITCH BATTLE

■ A face-off with a witch sees her transform into all number of threats, including this impressive dragon, complete with hairy armpits.

LOOKING PRETTY

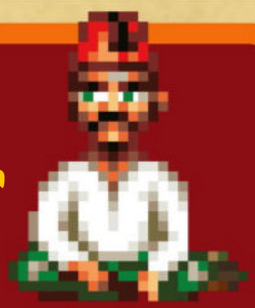
■ One of the prettier scenes in the game. You have to love the reflections of those ducks on the water. And the flowers make it quite serene.

» [PC] Although the publishing deal with Hasbro fell through, several references remain in the finished game, including jokes about *Magic: The Gathering* and *Monopoly*.

» [PC] Unlike later sequels, *Simon 3D* truly makes use of the third dimension, including puzzles that require you to think vertically, and in first-person.

» [PC] A big change for *Simon 3D* was the risk of death. Luckily for Simon, this dragon is unconscious.

SIMON SAYS...



WE SENT THESE QUESTIONS TO ADVENTURE SOFT HOPING SIMON WOODROFFE WOULD ANSWER THEM BUT THERE WAS SOME SORT OF MIX UP AND THEY CAME BACK FROM SIMON THE SORCERER INSTEAD...

It's been 32 years since *Simon The Sorcerer* released. How do you look back on your experience of making the game?
I didn't make it. I had to live through it being made. While that lot were messing about with pixels and writing lines for me to say, I was being put through the wringer dealing with talking Woodworms, Tolkien fanboys and foul swamp monsters.

What were your goals when creating *Simon The Sorcerer II*?
I suppose it was about being bigger, better and funnier. More jokes, more puzzles, more people to accidentally offend. These days I look back and think, "Wow, I had even less clue what I was doing than I thought and some of these jokes haven't aged well." But hey, it seemed to work.

With hindsight, *Simon The Sorcerer 3* probably made the jump to 3D too soon but is there anything you think still works?
Underneath the cube-shaped hands, there's still some classic 'me' charm. Some of the puzzles were clever. Some of the jokes actually landed. And some of the bugs only ruined like… two-thirds of it.

What was it like to let *Simon The Sorcerer* be handled by a completely different team when parts *4* and *5* were made?
I'm a model professional – I just did my job as always but I didn't have much say in those games, no. Suddenly I was in the hands of strangers, doing weird stuff, saying things I'd never say… I don't regret it, but happy to be back to my old self in *Origins*.

What can you tell us about the cancelled *Simon The Sorcerer: Between Worlds*?
Now that was looking good. Proper storytelling, sharp writing, me back on form – it had real promise. The StoryBeasts lot actually 'got' me. It had heart, and I'm still a bit miffed it never saw the light of day.

What has the experience been like to collaborate on *Origins*?
Working with the team has been fun – they've done a proper job of capturing the spirit of the old days whilst giving it all a 21st century update. I used to be able to count all my pixels but now I can barely even see the little sods. Favourite bit? I get to be me again. Sarcastic. Reluctant. Slightly better dressed.

» [PC] There's still humour in the fifth game, but it never feels as sharp as the early titles.

under its own steam and self-publish (with Southpeak publishing in the US) which effectively delayed the game to 2002, by which point its 3D visuals looked extremely dated.

"It had a massive impact and essentially spelled the end for Adventure Soft," Andrew recalls. "It meant the focus of our time had to shift to finding a new publisher, which means diverting resources to producing demos, often using areas of the game that weren't finished, and spending a lot of time pitching and writing proposals. When you have to rapidly develop a chunk of the game to near-final quality, it often means hacking stuff together without the luxury of time to consider how it will scale to full production. So we would often have to go back over work that had already been done, to make it more robust, or remove some of the 'smoke and mirrors' put in to make the demo look nice.

"During that time, we were told that Adventure Soft was essentially closing, and was being reborn as Headfirst Productions. It also meant a shift towards multi-project development, to spread the risk of being reliant on just one publishing partner. This meant that a lot of the *Simon 3D* team were then diverted to working on other prototypes and projects to help try and get another game up and running. Development of *Simon 3D* continued, but with a real skeleton staff, which therefore meant progress was slowed considerably – a real shame for the project, but we had to find another source of income or it would have been the end for Headfirst too."

***Simon The Sorcerer 3D* would turn out to be the final release under the Adventure Soft name and the last in the series to be created by the Woodroffes.** Headfirst Productions went on to create the cult horror game *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth* and then also closed down soon after, leaving the future of *Simon The Sorcerer* very much in doubt. That is, until a few years later when German developer Silver Style Entertainment licensed the rights to create two official sequels of its own.

Simon The Sorcerer 4: Chaos Happens released in 2007 and was followed up in 2009 with *Simon The Sorcerer: Who'd Even Want Contact?*. The former saw Simon caught in a love triangle between Alix and his own doppelgänger, while the latter saw aliens from outer space invade the fantasy world, which certainly isn't the most obvious idea for a sequel.

» [PC] Simon appears from a wardrobe and finds himself at a literal crossroads.

Although these games returned to a traditional point-and-click style, they lacked the charm of the original trilogy, featuring dull visuals and uninspired stories. Most harmfully, the humour just didn't feel the same, either because the Woodroffes were no longer involved or because the German jokes didn't really translate well into English.

"British humour is very popular in Germany. However, it is no longer the case that Germany is completely lacking in humour,' insists *Simon The Sorcerer 4*'s designer Stefan Hoffmann. "I still like the joke of ordering coffee 'with without' milk from the ship's computer to destroy it," says *Simon 5*'s designer Johanna Janiszewski. "Ordering something 'with without/mit ohne' is colloquial language in German, although grammatically wrong," she explains, adding, "I am not sure if it works the same in English." Nor us, Johanna!

Questionable humour aside, these two games kept the series alive for a while and gave Simon fans something new to play, but they made virtually no impact on the genre as a whole and are now largely forgotten and no longer available on digital stores.

In 2014, for a brief moment, it looked like there might be a return to form for the series as Irish developer StoryBeasts acquired the rights and announced that not only would it be making a brand-new game, it would both return to 2D visuals and once again star Chris Barrie! This promising new adventure was due to be funded on Kickstarter, hot on the heels of Tim Schafer's successfully crowd-funded adventure revival *Broken Age*, but the campaign never went live and in 2016 StoryBeasts sadly announced that the project had been abandoned.

» [PC] The fifth game adopted a slightly more palatable visual style than the fourth game, but remained a fairly mediocre experience.

SPIN-OFF GAMES

SIMON HAS A COUPLE MORE TRICKS UP HIS SLEEVE...

Simon hasn't just appeared in adventure games. In 1998, during the long gap between *Simon 2* and *Simon 3D*, Adventure Soft published two spin-off titles exclusively for PC. *Simon The Sorcerer's Pinball* is exactly what you'd expect, a digital pinball table featuring designs and sounds from the series. It's not bad but it's not great either; just one single table with fairly unremarkable design. Then there's *Simon The Sorcerer's Puzzle Pack*, a compilation of desktop distractions, including a series of solitaire card games, a sliding block puzzle and a virtual pet. The star attraction of the compilation is *Swampy Adventures*, which promises an adventure focussed on the Swampling rescuing his children from Sordid but is, in reality, a rather tedious *Sokoban*-style puzzle game. Both titles were eventually bundled in a box set along with the first two games and *The Feeble Files* and have never been made available digitally, which isn't a great loss.

» [PC] The table certainly looks nice, but it's very simple with unexciting play mechanics.

» [PC] One of the simple games to be found in *Simon The Sorcerer's Puzzle Pack*.

» [PC] *Between Worlds* would have seen Simon grow up into middle age, finally breaking free of puberty but not sarcasm.

» Chris Barrie (middle), the original voice of Simon, in the recording studio for the cancelled *Between Worlds*.

» [PC] A classic style inventory will feature in *Origins*, which is sure to please old-school adventure fans.

Dave McCabe, the narrative lead at Spooky Doorway, developers of the *Darkside Detective* series and the upcoming *The Séance Of Blake Manor* was narrative designer on what would have been *Simon The Sorcerer: Between Worlds*. "Bear in mind that this was about ten years ago, before Marvel had oversaturated the world with multiverse stuff," says Dave. "The idea was that you would play as Simon, now middle-aged, in his usual universe and as Simone, one of his alternate universe counterparts. Tears in time and space were allowing them to interact with and influence one another's world. I believe we set this game as a continuation from *1* and *2* and ignored anything from *3* onwards, except in the finale, which was going to have both Simon and Simone go on an inter-dimensional chase which would have brought them through the worlds of *3*, *4*, *5*, and even the pinball game."

B*etween Worlds* seems like it could have been a great return to form, especially with Chris Barrie back in the recording booth and the designer of the critically acclaimed *Darkside Detective* involved. It's a true shame that it will never see the light of day. However, over a decade later, Simon is about to get a second chance at redemption.

Due for release 28 October 2025, *Simon The Sorcerer Origins* has a lot in common with the cancelled *Between Worlds*. It's both a return to 2D visuals and also stars Chris Barrie, but this time it's a prequel rather than a sequel, telling the story of a younger Simon before his first adventure in the fantasy realm. Quite how this makes sense isn't quite clear yet. How could there be a prequel when Simon arrived in this realm for the first time in the original game and seemed to be an ordinary boy?

"I based Simon's return precisely on the idea that it had to be a prequel," explains Massy Calamai, founder of developer Smallthing Studios and director of *Simon The Sorcerer Origins*. "I wanted a rebirth of the saga, I wanted the character to return with his acidic and irreverent spirit, but thanks to the current world of videogames, I wanted there to be plenty of room to delve deeper into him. Fans will rediscover the spirit of the saga, particularly the first game, with which it has a strong connection, although it's not essential to have played it, as *Origins* is set in 1993, a few weeks before the events of the original."

Massy points out that the story of the first game begins with Simon and his dog finding a magic book that transports them to another world, but never explains where the book came from or why it was there, suggesting *Origins* will answer this question and more. "In *Origins*, we add notes to many narrative responses from the first episode and expand on the relationships between the characters and Simon and his family. *Origins* is a groundbreaking, complete, and conclusive game, but if played before *Simon The Sorcerer* 1, it finds perfect narrative and temporal synchronicity."

» [PC] It looks like *Simon The Sorcerer Origins* will show more of Simon's life in the 'real' world.

» [PC] Familiar characters like Calypso will appear in the prequel, but to find out how that makes sense, we'll need to wait and see.

Massy is also determined to bring something new to the game design while also honouring the classics. "We've maintained a strong connection to classic adventure games," he says, "So yes, we have an inventory and item combos, but with a streamlined, modern control system. At the same time, we've added some very original gameplay elements based on discovering spells to cast that transform the use of Simon's magic hat and, consequently, the use of items."

After years of disappointing sequels and near misses, *Simon The Sorcerer* fans are due a break and will be hoping for *Origins* to deliver an experience that recaptures the magic of the first two games. We'll know soon if Smallthing Studios has pulled it off, but Massy, who himself began his career on the Amiga with games like the cult hit *Fightin' Spirit*, certainly seems like a dedicated fan himself. "The work done to create this title was an extraordinary passion on everyone's part," he enthusiastically tells us. "It was a daunting challenge to create a prequel to such a legendary title, revitalising it. The challenge I asked for was tough: we drew everything by hand, we studied the comedy in detail and what was missing from the saga, we recreated original sounds and music, and reunited actors like Chris Barrie and Erick Borner… I'm proud of this, of our staff, and of these five years of consistently passionate work. I'd be happy to hear players say, 'I laughed and I cried.' That's what I want."

MADE IN ITALY

SMALLTHING STUDIOS FOUNDER MASSY CALAMAI DISCUSSES THE MAKING OF SIMON THE SORCERER ORIGINS

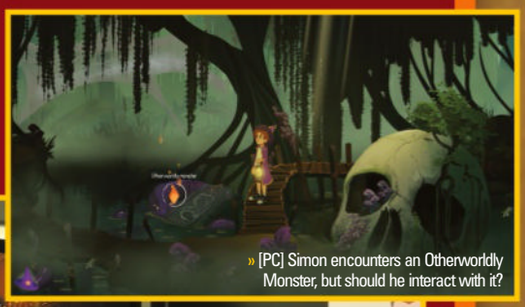
In 1996, you created one of the Amiga's best fighting games, *Fightin' Spirit*, and now you're making a sequel to a classic Amiga adventure. Do you have a strong affinity for the computer?
The Amiga is a computer to which I owe most of my love for this sector, my knowledge, my practic, and my career. I love it. I still have a station at home that's been active since the late-Eighties. I loved Lucasarts and Sierra adventures. It was during this time that I met Simon The Sorcerer and I adored him. The character was one of the most believable in games of the time, and that fantasy-adventure mix with 32-colour graphics on screen… wonderful.

To what extent did you collaborate with Mike and Simon Woodroffe on the new game?
We had a great idea, a great plot, and we presented it to the Woodroffes, who reacted with amazement and emotion. The initial contact was the most delicate phase, as we were presenting a prequel that touched on the plot of the first episode. But once they understood what we wanted and our experience, they trusted us without any limits or restrictions.

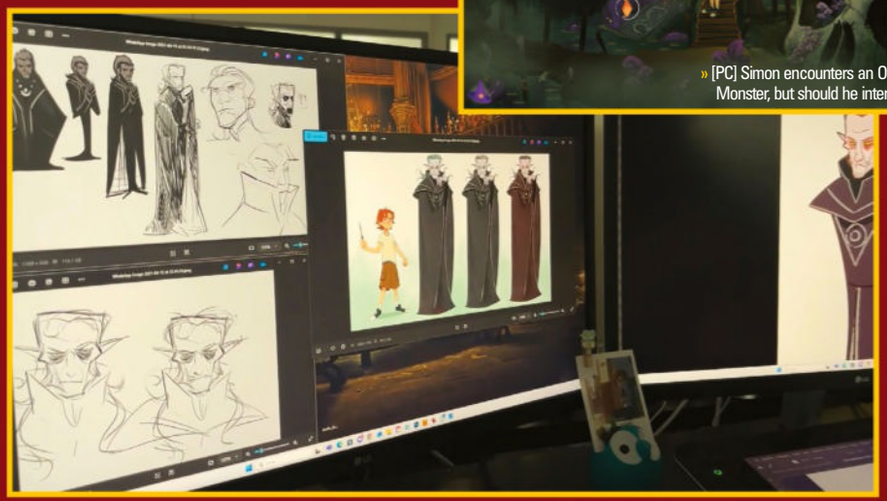
What was it like to reunite Chris Barrie with the role of Simon?
It was a gift we wanted to give to all the fans. Many asked us if he'd return, and we made a great effort to make it happen. Working with Chris was exciting; he's an incredible actor and professional. We spent days with him in the recording studio to define the tone and expressions. He understood what we wanted, interpreted it and improved some of his lines.

Erik Borner, who voiced Simon in the German sequels, also returns. Is this something German fans requested?
We wanted to recreate all the magic of the past, and the German fans were clamouring for it! Erik was fantastic; we immediately established a close relationship that continues to this day. He gave Simon a wonderful tone: when you try the game, probably with the English dub, I recommend you check out the German dub too.

Rick Astley's *Together Forever* will feature on the soundtrack. Why did you want to include a real pop song in the game?
In perfect Nineties style, I wanted the title to begin with a song. We had very clear ideas about the narrative events and wanted a significant piece for this moment that would fit the world of 1993. *Together Forever* was a perfect ballad: one of the most famous songs of that era, by an English singer, the perfect song for Simon to listen to.



» [PC] Simon encounters an Otherworldly Monster, but should he interact with it?



» Here's a look behind the scenes of some of the characters found in *Simon The Sorcerer Origins*.

» [PlayStation] The shotgun. Powerful, messy and spectacularly entertaining.

OFFICIAL UK PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE #31

THE PLAYSTATION HAD TAKEN THE WORLD BY STORM AND BUILT AN EARLY LIBRARY OF ICONIC TITLES. NOW THEY WERE GETTING SEQUELS, WHICH WOULD BUILD ON THEIR FOUNDATIONS AND DELIVER SOME OF THE BEST GAMES EVER MADE. THIS MONTH'S DISC FEATURES ONE OF THEM

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

THIS MONTH IN MARCH 1998

The PlayStation was riding high in 1998. Its success had pushed gaming into the mainstream and gamers basked in a new sense of cultural relevance. PlayStations were now found at nightclubs, as well as bedrooms and living rooms. Talk of the next PlayStation had started, and a new Sega contender was expected, but neither had been officially announced. For now, the games continued to get better, with developers pushing the system ever further. The month's big demo was *Resident Evil 2*, accompanied by *Dynasty Warriors*, *Rascal* and *Gex*. *Terra Incognita* also impressed.

THE MAIN EVENT: RESIDENT EVIL 2 DEMO

Resident Evil 2 was eagerly anticipated and this timed demo didn't disappoint. Hideki Kamiya took over from Shinji Mikami in the director's chair and delivered an incredible sequel. Set a couple of months after the first game, the outbreak at the mansion has now spread to Raccoon City. The game's relentless opening minutes are some of the most memorable in gaming. The zombies are faster and more numerous and everything feels more dynamic, with flames flickering and chaos reigning.

As rookie cop Leon, you're under constant pressure. Right from the start, zombies bear down on you. You're outnumbered, and dodging is often more practical than wasting ammo on the legions of hungry undead. Eventually you reach the apparent safety of the city's police station. However there's little respite there, though it's likely here that the clock will get you before the zombies do.

The ten-minute timer adds extra spice. The faster you go the more of the game you can see, making it perfect for repeated play, and a bit of living-room competition. Dripping with gore and with a constant sense of threat, *Resi* is more than willing to pull the rug out from under you when you think you've got things under control. It's unforgettable, and full of shocks and surprises. Sound design is immaculate, with moans and gargles of the zombies adding to the dread. You frequently hear something nasty before you see it, stepping blindly into the camera hoping you can spot it before it's upon you. *Resident Evil 2* was reviewed in the

» [PlayStation] "Sorry, but it looks like your party… has been cancelled."

» [PlayStation] Picking your battles is crucial. Let's leave these lads be for now.

» [PlayStation] It's wise to keep a few spare shells around for the bigger beasts.

same issue and got a well-deserved 9/10. It's a testament to its brilliance that even after all these years, it still feels like it's over too soon.

PLAY THIS NEXT: DYNASTY WARRIORS DEMO

Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* is a one-on-one fighting game, unlike later series entries which saw you taking on entire armies. Set in 3rd century China, the game draws on the *Romance Of The Three Kingdoms* saga, with a couple of samurai warriors thrown in, too.

The demo lets you play as the brutal, spear-wielding Zhang Fei or Xiahou Dun, armed with a sword, who famously devoured his own arrow-stricken eye. It requires a careful approach with button mashing sure to end in defeat. There's also a Chi Meter, letting you unleash the game's devastating Musou attacks. This is an enjoyable fighter that leaves you wondering what might have been if the series hadn't changed direction.

Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST

GEX 3D DEMO

■ *Gex* is a technically impressive platformer with varied levels and a charismatic main character. You're a gecko and are exploring a haunted mansion in the game's Smellraiser level. There's a good variety of obstacles and enemies and you have a deadly tail and tongue to help defeat them with, though your worst enemy is the camera.

Gex's quips, voiced by the late Leslie Phillips in the UK version, are sadly absent from the demo, but his personality shines through in the expressive animation.

RASCAL DEMO

■ A fascinating semi-forgotten curio, *Rascal* is a platform adventure by Travellers Tales, with Jim Henson's Creature Shop involved in the design. The demo lets you explore the game's Aztec Chicimeca temple, dodging traps and shooting spiders and rats.

It's experimental, and almost feels like a 3D take on an 8-bit flip-screen classic. It doesn't quite nail the feel though, due to the tank controls and awkward camera, but it is inventive.

TERRA INCOGNITA

■ This is an impressive Net Yaroze homebrew game by Japanese developers Team Fatal, whose programmer Mitsuru Kamiyama would go on to join Square Enix and work on the *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* and *Dragon Quest* series. Set on a mysterious island, it's a blocky puzzler, with platforms, crates and bombs. *Terra Incognita* features unpleasant blobby enemies that make life difficult for you, along with an hour time limit to keep the pressure on. It's a valiant effort, even if the English translation raises a few smiles at times.

» [PlayStation] Wait for the right opening and you can send your opponent flying.

» [PlayStation] Zhang Fei's polearm lets you pick at enemies' health from a distance. Just don't get too close.

MAGAZINE CRAFT

STEVE JARRATT

Whether it was in the Newsfield office in Ludlow or Future Publishing in Bath, Steve Jarratt spent years reporting on the gaming scene as it went through its most dramatic changes. We join him to look back on a career that includes many beloved and enduring titles, from Zzap!64 and Commodore Format, to Edge and the Official UK PlayStation Magazine

Words by Nick Thorpe

THEN

After joining Newsfield to work on *Zzap!64* in the Eighties, Steve had a brief stint at EMAP before moving to Future, where he'd spend over 20 years working on titles such as *ACE, Amiga Format, S: The Sega Magazine, Total!, T3* and more.

NOW

Steve has been working on gaming books for Bitmap Books in recent years, and although he says that he's "winding down and gradually sliding into retirement" there's still at least one coming down the line for 2026.

Was writing something you'd aspired to do, coming out of school, Steve?

I got a bunch of O levels at school, but I wasn't really thinking about a career at all. I fell into chemistry because I quite like the sciences, and we had a really nice chemistry book. Because I was in the West Midlands, we were surrounded by industry, and I eventually got a job at a company called British Industrial Plastics. So I was, for eight or nine years, studying to be an industrial chemist – I got a degree in chemistry. A few years later, I was introduced to the ZX Spectrum by a friend at work. I just remember going around his house, and we were playing with the flight sim game, which I think was called *Flight Simulator*, and I just thought, "This is it. This is absolutely the future." It kind of felt like a real lightbulb moment.

> "Everybody was in their late-teens or early 20s, so their desks were covered in bits of paper, cigarettes and ashtrays, empty cans of pop, joypads, just detritus everywhere"
> STEVE JARRATT

Not long after that, I got a Commodore 64 and started buying *Zzap!*, because that was the best C64 magazine. They had a bunch of people there including, Julian Rignall, Gary Penn and Gary Liddon. Gary Liddon left after about a dozen issues, 18 issues or something. And they asked the readers if they could fill Liddon's shoes. I thought, "I'll apply for the job, and if I'm lucky, I'll get to go to the offices, meet Roger Kean, Oliver Frey, meet Jaz and Gary." I completely forgot about it – months and months went by, and I got called in for an interview and I had to go in and review Codemasters' *BMX Simulator*, which I wasn't expecting to do. I finally met Oli Frey, saw some of his artwork and where he worked. Did it, I forgot about it, and again more time passed.

I think, according to legend, I was the third on the list. They had one guy who took the job and wasn't very good, another guy turned them down, and so yay, third is best, right? So I took the job. Well, they offered it to me, and I went, "Oh my god, what am I going to do?" But it coincided with me being made redundant from the chemical company, so I kind of went, "OK, well, there you go. That's fate making your decision for you." So I took the job and moved to Ludlow and worked on *Zzap!* for about 14 months.

How did you find the adjustment to your new career?

It was just fantastic. Newsfield was operating from the middle of Ludlow, above a Yates's Wine Lodge or whatever it was, and I think they had three floors in this big sort of townhouse, and we were on the second or third. It was fairly open plan, great big desks and shelves and shelves [of games]. There was just stuff everywhere, basically – there were broken joypads, working joypads and monitors, dozens of C64s and bits of drives and boxes of cassettes and disks, and joypads everywhere. Everybody was in their late-teens or early 20s, so their desks were covered in bits of paper, cigarettes and ashtrays, empty cans of pop, joypads, just detritus everywhere. But it was

» Steve loved his time playing Commodore 64 games amidst the chaos of the Newsfield office.

WIN A STAR WARS ARCADE MACHINE
ST AMIGA C64
CPC SPECTRUM PC
NINTENDO SEGA
ACE
ADVANCED
IT'S WAR IN MIDDLE EARTH
The First Full Reviews of WAR IN MIDDLE EARTH, PHANTOM FIGHTER, Lucasfilm's BATTLEHAWKS and INCREDIBLE SHRINKING SPHERE
FREE
IF YOU CAN READ THIS
What do BIG K, the JUPITER ACE and ASTON VILLA have in common? - Find the answer on page 23

» Moving to *ACE* was a welcome reprieve from a stint as a freelancer that Steve didn't particularly enjoy.

just brilliant because it felt really exciting – quite skin of your teeth; I can imagine how some people feel as a startup, it had that slightly ramshackle feel to it. But I was sitting there going, "They are paying me to play videogames, this is the best job ever." It absolutely was, because as I went through my career and went up the ranks, it was never so much fun as when I could just sit there with a new game. They'd give it to me, I might get two a day or whatever, and I'd sit and play them for hours and then spend the afternoon writing them up. It was just fantastic.

> "I might get two a day or whatever, and I'd sit and play them for hours and then spend the afternoon writing them up. It was just fantastic"
> STEVE JARRATT

You spent a little while at EMAP, but that didn't last for long, and then moved to Future to work on *ACE*, where you lasted far longer than the magazine. What's the story there?

Yeah, brilliant magazine, lovely to work on for all of the four issues I think I managed to do. That was a real blow. So Graeme Kidd was editing *ACE* at the time, and he headhunted me to be a staff writer on the magazine. I get there, and soon afterwards it was sold to EMAP – there's a great anecdote about it. I think we were working around Christmas or the New Year, and we were told, "We've been sold – pack everything up, shove it in boxes, they're going to take the whole thing." We all kind of breathed a sigh of relief, because the issue was going absolutely terribly. We'd done almost nothing. Apparently, our box of stuff got to EMAP in London, and they kind of went, "Where's the rest of it?" We only had a couple of games in for review. So their first issue, apparently, was just awful, because they started late in the schedule and had nothing to show for it. I don't think we'd even got that much copy or anything. So yeah, we kind of dodged the bullet on that issue, but I was really sad to see it go, because going from *Zzap!* to something like *ACE* felt like a step up.

So your first launch as an editor was *S: The Sega Magazine*, which must have been an interesting magazine to start at a time when consoles hadn't yet overtaken home computers?

Absolutely, yeah. I believe it was Europe's first official magazine, which would obviously be a bit of a thread for me moving forward. But in truth it was rubbish; just terrible. It was my first editing job. I didn't know what I was doing. I was just making it up as I went along. Badly.

With official magazines being a new concept, did you have much communication with Sega at the time?

Well, we were speaking more to Mastertronic, because they were the distributors of the Master System. I can't remember if we had ▶

My MEMORABLE MAG COVER

"Wow, I'm torn on this one," says Steve. "I've done some terrible covers – I've set out with really good intentions rather than just 'stick a screenshot on a cover, that'll do'. Every time I try to do something a little bit interesting and unusual, it has just not worked out very well at all." Citing an example, he explains, "I'm not like a deep reader, but I do like science fiction as a sort of visual thing, and I used to buy lots of portfolio books of artists like Chris Foss. The first issue of *Commodore Format* was done by a famous science fiction artist, Peter Elson, I've got his book. It's not a particularly thrilling image, because it's Commodore's ill-fated GS console, but it's done by one of my favourite illustrators ever, who's sadly no longer with us."

I REMEMBER WHEN

PIXEL PERFECT

"On *Commodore Format*, I would sit after work redrawing screenshots because our grabbing system was rubbish. So I would sit there in an art package, tidying up the straight lines and changing the colours to make the screenshots look better."

» *Commodore Format* was a surprise success, selling well despite the age of the platform it covered.

PROBOTECTOR II
For NES (1-2 players)
From Konami
Price £45
TOTAL! TEK-SPEX
BLISTERS
Take just one hit and you lose any spunky weapons you may have. Two-player mode takes the sting out
ILLASTERS
It looks terrific and moves beautifully. It is incredibly hard, but it's fair too. The action is non-stop
NES Rolling and strolling...
Different parts of the game need different tactics to get through them:
TACTIC
Final rating 91 Percent
NES REVIEWS 48 TOTAL! ISSUE FOURTEEN FEBRUARY 1993
FEBRUARY 1993 ISSUE FOURTEEN TOTAL! 49 NES REVIEWS

» Steve enjoyed *Probotector II*, but we can see how this might have been a pain to design.

MY MUCH-MISSED COLLEAGUES

"Andy [Dyer] was the funniest man you could ever meet, anybody will tell you that, and he was a really funny, inventive writer. He came for an interview for when I was about to launch *Commodore Format*, and I wanted to tell him before he even left that I wanted him to do the job. We just clicked in such an incredible way. He just made it enjoyable to work on both of the magazines, and even when the shit was hitting the fan it was still fun.

I REMEMBER WHEN

THE REVIEW PROCESS

"You'd have a day or two to do these big games. People will think that sounds ridiculous, but 8-bit games, they're very structured, often they're quite short, often they're very simple in their mechanics. Once you play three or four levels, you go, 'Yeah, I get this, they're just going to get harder.' Sometimes, the better games, you'd obviously sit and play it for as long as you could. And also, we did play games during lunch and after work as well. We didn't go, 'Ooh, 5:30, hit the pub,' we'd just carry on doing whatever we needed to do until we got booted out."

sign off from Japan – I think maybe the first one, they just made sure we weren't doing anything crazy, and they'd set some guidelines. After that, I think there were a few bits and pieces that we were obligated to do, but largely it was making a game magazine for kids, which was fairly straightforward.

> "I mean, the Atari ST and Amiga were all sloshing around, but the Commodore 64 was still doing good business for Commodore"
> STEVE JARRATT

After that, you returned to the C64 to launch *Commodore Format*. Did you feel better about that launch?

That was great, even though some people would think it was a retrograde step, going from consoles back to the Commodore 64. I mean, the Atari ST and Amiga were all sloshing around, but the Commodore 64 was still doing good business for Commodore. And I just thought, "I know the market, I know this machine really well," and it was nice to kind of do a modern take on *Zzap!* magazine. I'm actually really proud of *Commodore Format*, because of the team I had with me. We had me and Sean Masterson, and Andy Dyer, we had Trevor Gilham and then Ollie Alderton on art. And it was good – it was full of fun and we had some great cartoons in it, and Andy wrote some really good copy.

It sold really well, too. I think even Future was surprised, actually – we overtook *Zzap!*, which at that point, had sort of lost a lot of its character. I didn't hold a grudge with the people who were running it, but to go and launch a brand-new Commodore 64 magazine and beat them was just great. It was such a feather in our cap, whether that was quality of the magazine or the Power Pack. Who knows? I mean, the Power Pack obviously was a really strong incentive to buy the magazine. But a lot of people speak very fondly about the mag and the Power Pack doesn't really come up that much. So hopefully it was a combination of the two. We chose the right stuff to go on – we could have put any old crap on the tape, and we didn't. Largely, it was quite well chosen, and the magazine, I thought was good – we wrote funny copy, and we took it quite seriously in terms of reviews.

The next launch was the Nintendo magazine *Total!*, at a time when the UK market hadn't embraced Nintendo in the way that other territories had. How was that one to work on?

I'd become a convert. I played the NES when I was at *Zzap!* but I wasn't totally enamoured of it, because at the time the NES felt less powerful and less pretty graphically than the Commodore 64. But then Graeme Kidd went to Japan, while I was on either *ACE* or a business magazine after *ACE* was sold. Anyway, he brought me back a Game Boy, and that was me converted. I was at the point where I kind of went, "Yeah, I like consoles a lot, with cartridges, instant access, it all works, lovely." It's a long time ago, and I can't remember the exact circumstances – obviously, me and

techview: sound
techview: sound
Sound
scape
Sound is often a forgotten factor in the gaming experience. But Dolby Surround and QSound are about to change all that; Edge immerses itself in the sounds of the future
Dolby Surround gives real cinema-quality 3D sound, and is fast carving a path into the videogame world
Bang
Crunch
Whizz

» *Edge* set about covering videogame production and technology as much as the games themselves.

Andy Dyer, we'd done *Commodore Format*, and they asked us to do this new magazine.

The NES had evolved in terms of gameplay. One of the big games for the launch magazine was *Super Mario Bros 3*, which is largely the reason we almost didn't hit our deadline, because me and Andy, we just sat playing it day after day – obviously, for research purposes. But we pumped hours into *Super Mario Bros 3*, and then almost failed to get the magazine out on time. But yeah, the Game Boy was cool and there was a real sense of growing momentum with Nintendo, but my memory of that time was more panic just to get the damn thing out the door. Because it was a really tricky one.

> "One of the big games for the launch magazine was Super Mario Bros 3, which is largely the reason we almost didn't hit our deadline, because me and Andy, we just sat playing it day after day – obviously, for research purposes"
> STEVE JARRATT

After that, there's *Edge* – now the UK's longest-running games magazine, and quite a different one from everything else that existed in 1993.

So when EMAP bought *ACE*, they said, "Well that's very lovely of you, have £1.2 million. Also, it'd be great if you didn't launch any multiformat games magazines to compete with the one that you just sold to us." I think that might have lasted five years, and of course as soon as it was up, Future went, "Right, let's launch a multiformat games magazine." I was knocking on by then, and I thought, "Isn't it about time we had a magazine that isn't full of quirky characters?" I mean, I'm probably, retconning this, but I think after the misery of doing *Total!*, with all its high-resolution characters and cartoons and stuff, I was just thinking, "Let's just stop that, and let's just do a normal magazine."

I used to buy a magazine, no longer around, of course, called *Cinefex*. I loved visual effects in movies, back from the *Star Wars* days and before then, Ray Harryhausen and all that kind of stuff. This magazine was a quarterly, and it used to be full of anecdotes and quotes from people doing feature film movie effects. Even though I knew I could never get a job in the industry, this made me feel like I was a part of it somehow, because I was getting all these stories and all this background information on how the films were made. And I sort of took that as a stepping stone and thought, "Let's do something about games that delves a bit deeper," because I was fascinated with how they were made.

Of course, we were just entering the CD-ROM 'interactive movies' phase games were going through at that point, so I knew that some of the assets that people were getting for FMV sequences and for the games themselves had come from the movies. So it was all becoming a real mishmash of technologies and shared processes. That's kind of what I ▶

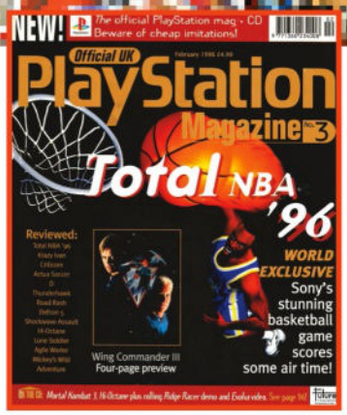
My MEMORABLE PRESS TRIP

"There's a famous PR person called Danielle Woodyatt, and she rocks up and she goes, 'We're going to go to America.' I went, 'OK, that's lovely. We'll go and see some games devs.' We got over there and she said, 'So what are you going to do for the supplement?' I went, 'What supplement?' So we'd ended up at Lucasfilm Games, and she said, 'Yeah, you're here to do a supplement for *Edge* on Lucasfilm Games.' So I didn't have a camera, didn't have a tape recorder, I'd got nothing. I'd gone there with my sunnies and a beach towel, and I had to go to the shops and buy all this stuff and then start interviewing people about bloody Lucasfilm Games. I took a photograph of George Lucas' office and I got told off, but I still used it in the supplement. So, screw you, Lucas!"

I REMEMBER WHEN

EDGE'S DEMOCRACY?

"The original idea is that we would sort of chat about everything, and make sure that if one person said everything, we all agreed with it, which is a very noble aspiration, and immediately didn't happen, because you have to get a magazine out. You haven't got time to sit and go, 'Oh no, I'm not sure it should be a seven.'"



» Beyond occasional cover requests, Sony didn't offer much direction for its new official magazine.

Playtest
Jumping Flash
Platform games have been around since the dawn of man but it's taken until now for them to enter the third dimension. PSM reckons this game's a real gas
PlayStation Magazine

» *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* covered an expensive new console, and the look and feel reflected that.

MUCH-MISSED COLLEAGUES

"Jason [Brookes] was such a lovely man. What a videogamer, attuned to the videogame market and technology, he was a real find for us. Obviously he'd been working on *Super Play* because he's a massive Nintendo fan, but he came on and just like a jigsaw puzzle piece, slotted straight into *Edge* and just got on with it. He'd kind of go, 'I've got some pictures coming from Japan that have to go in,' right on deadline, and of course he did that when he became editor. But that's why *Edge* was always full of cutting-edge stuff, because he'd take it right to the wire."

I REMEMBER WHEN

BAGGING EDGE

"The publisher, Steve Carey, he came up with the idea of doing, sort of an anti-marketing campaign, 'This magazine is not for you. It's smart, it's well written, it's some really nice paper stock. Yeah, you're probably not interested.' And then he went, 'Why don't we bag it and cover it up completely, so you don't even know what you're getting.' Which was brave/crazy at the time, but that helped to generate a lot of mystique around it as well."

wanted to bring to it. The idea was to sort of force the adultness. The idea was that it would have a single voice. All the other magazines were, "Andy does this, and Steve says this," and we have all these characters. So the antithesis of that is to just go, nobody gets a credit. It's just *Edge*. *Edge* says this thing, and you should believe it, because we're all experienced, we're all professional. And then I was partnered with a guy called Matt Williams, who did the design. He was a proper designer, he liked highfalutin things like *Ray Gun* and other designer magazines of the period, and he brought his own aesthetic to it. I think we combined really nicely.

> "Little did I know it would eventually, not under my tenure of course, but it would go on to sell 300,000 copies a month"
> STEVE JARRATT

Then there was *Official UK PlayStation Magazine*, which became absolutely enormous in terms of sales.

This was a massive deal. I don't think anybody really knew it at the time, but my god, yeah. Me and Jason [Brookes] went to Sony in London, to see Phil Harrison – he was running the show at PlayStation back then. He invited us to see some stuff, and he showed us the dinosaur tech demo. We sat there, kind of jaws on the floor, going, "Oh, OK, right." We were under NDA, and I think we might have seen the console? Can't remember, a long time ago. And I went back, spoke to the CEO at Future, Greg Ingham – at some point I spoke to him and said, "Look, this thing's coming. I want to do the magazine, because this looks absolutely incredible." We knew we could hand *Edge* over to Jason and so I went off to launch the *Official PlayStation Magazine*. Little did I know it would eventually, not under my tenure of course, but it would go on to sell 300,000 copies a month, which is just phenomenal. When I was at it, I think we managed to get up to about 70,000. I mean, the PlayStation just exploded across the country. And again, we had the demo disc, which was – a bit like *Commodore Format*'s tape, how much impact you can apportion to that, I don't know. I suspect the disc had way more effect, because on *Commodore Format*, budget games were £1.99. For the PlayStation, they were 20 quid. So I think the demo disc had a really big impact on the magazine – it had to, to sell that many copies, even though the magazines have always been good.

And obviously it was a big, important magazine in the market. Magazines gain their own gravity, so the bigger you get, the more the publishers came to you – they brought their games because you're the place to be seen first. You get all the first plays and everything, you get all the previews. So the magazine was always very, very good, but the disc – I mean, I used to get the disc and play myself. I distinctly remember playing *Destruction Derby* on one of the first couple of magazines. I played the demo to death. I didn't bother getting the game, didn't need to. I had the demo where you just crashed into everybody, over and over and over again. It was brilliant.

Sony was obviously putting a huge amount of money into breaking into the console market – was the company more hands-

My FUTURE CLASSIC

CYBERPUNK 2077

"I've got a Switch 2, a PS5 Pro and an Xbox Series X. I came to *Cyberpunk 2077* late in its life, when it was patched for the Xbox, and that was phenomenal. And that was a *No Man's Sky* type turnaround – well, it was a *Cyberpunk 2077*-style turnaround. They fucked up massively. They released a game that was broken, but they fixed it, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. And certainly by the time it had this next-gen patch on the X, it was pretty much flawless. That was astonishing."

on than Sega and Mastertronic?
We only ever had a little bit of direction. They wanted, I think it was an NBA basketball game – it's got to go on the cover, it's Sony's big game. I mean, there have been people suggesting that we had score things a certain way. That didn't happen on my editorship, and I was not asked to. There shouldn't be any pushback at all on scores or anything. I mean saying what can and can't go on the cover, I can live with that because largely, if it's a big first-party Sony game, you're going to stick it on anyway. But I didn't get any hassle over scores.

> "There have been people suggesting that we had score things a certain way. That didn't happen on my editorship, and I was not asked to"
> STEVE JARRATT

After that, you moved out of games magazines to do *T3*, before moving on to become group senior editor, which we understand wasn't entirely your cup of tea?
Well, the one thing that I loved was getting off a monthly deadline. It was quite hard work, and just getting off that treadmill was great. I can say this now, because I don't work for Future – I was going in and I was just sitting at my desk going, "I have nothing to do. I just don't know how to fill my day." At this point, we didn't have many junior editors – a lot of the teams had been there for years, they knew their audience, they knew their mag, they knew their budgets, and they knew what was required of them. I felt bad because I was taking a decent wage at this point, and I'm not adding any value to the company. Arguably, I had already done that with my launches, but I just wasn't enjoying it. A position on *3D World* came up, which goes back to my interest in visual effects, so I went back and I did that for two years, and then I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time when the axe fell on Black Monday. I was the first to go in November 2011.

We know you did some work with some local publishers for a while, what are you up to these days?
I went freelance about 2013-2014, and that's what I've been doing ever since, just working from home, and each year I've done less and less. This year would have been nothing, apart from this morning, my friend Sam Dyer has commissioned me to write another book. So I've been editing and writing for Bitmap Books for like a decade now. And it pays well, and the deadlines are much longer for books, you have a much longer period of time to do them. So I can work at my own pace, which these days is slow, but it's great, because you're not pressured. I'm going to be doing an art book for a games company. Should be OK – 30,000 words, I can do that… eventually. *

SPECIAL LAUNCH ISSUE
THE SEGA MAGAZINE
ACTION UNLEASHED
Your complete guide to the exciting world of Sega entertainment

» Steve may not rate his Sega magazine, but its legacy includes *Sega Power* and *Saturn Power*.

EDGE
Mega Drive ■ Super Nintendo ■ PC ■ Amiga ■ PC Engine ■ Neo Geo ■ 3DO
The changing face of video games
3DO how the dream machine shapes up in real life
1

» You wouldn't have seen this *Edge* cover in the shops – it was hidden in an opaque bag.

"I'D BEEN WORKING IN INDIE FILM AND WRITING MUSIC FOR MYSELF FOR YEARS AND I WAS REALLY EXCITED TO DO THE GAME. LIKE, FALLING ALL OVER MYSELF EXCITED!"
JEFF TYMOSCHUK

007 Nightfire

THE LATE-NINETIES AND EARLY NOUGHTIES WERE THE GOLDEN YEARS OF JAMES BOND VIDEOGAMES. AT THE CENTRE OF IT ALL IS THE MUCH-LOVED 2002 RELEASE NIGHTFIRE. THE GAME'S CO-COMPOSER, AND LIFELONG BOND FAN, JEFF TYMOSCHUK KEENLY PAID HOMAGE TO THE SERIES' ICONIC MUSIC WITH HIS OWN REFERENCE-LADEN SOUNDTRACK

WORDS BY LIAM HEITMANN-RYCE-LEMERCIER

IN THE KNOW

- **DEVELOPER:** EUROCOM
- **COMPOSER:** JEFF TYMOSCHUK, WITH STEVE DUCKWORTH
- **BEST TRACK:** ENEMIES VANQUISHED
- **RELEASE:** 2002
- **PLATFORM:** GAMECUBE, VARIOUS
- **GENRE:** FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER

» [Xbox] You'll hear Jeff's *Nightfire* work in the numerous vehicle sections that the game features.

The dawn of the new millennium ushered in the sixth generation of videogame consoles – and with it, the peak era of *James Bond* interactive titles. The crop of *Bond* games released across the early Noughties represented bespoke adventures, separate from the film series, with unique storylines and locations which Bond himself had yet to visit.

Among the most-beloved titles of this period is *Nightfire*, offering a blockbuster mashup of the franchise's greatest hits, with plot inspirations taking root in everything from *Moonraker* to *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*.

For the game's action-packed score, composer Jeff Tymoschuk took a similarly reflective approach, with playful references to many iconic soundtracks of previous *Bond* adventures. Sharing creative duties with UK-based composer Steve Duckworth, who scored all of the first-person missions, Jeff invested around four months to produce the 25 minutes of music that made it to the final soundtrack. "That seems like an incredibly slow pace," Jeff admits today with a chuckle, "compared to what I, or other people, have to deal with now. It's been a long time since I've thought about the day-to-day of working on it, but, you know, I'd been working in indie film and writing music for myself for years and I was really excited to do the game. Like, falling all over myself excited! It was the biggest thing, scope-wise, that I'd ever worked on."

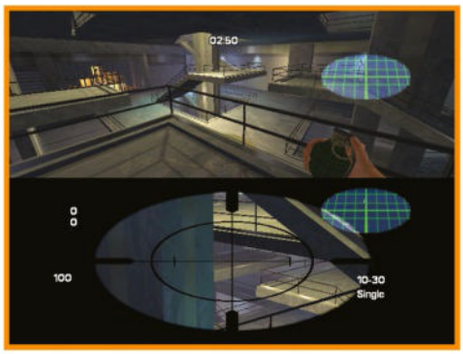
The assignment also represented a significant learning curve for the then 27-year-old composer, making a transition from more rudimentary hardware samplers to computer-based samplers. While a challenge, the step-up in tech allowed Jeff infinitely broader experimentation than he had enjoyed on other projects. "Those samplers had a GB of RAM on them! Oh, wow, you'll never use all that space," he recalls today with a warm laugh. "I spent far more time than seems reasonable on the details, figuring out how to do bigger-scale orchestrations. I'm just going over and over all the little components in every piece, to the best of what I could pull off without really knowing what I was doing."

JEFF TYMOSCHUK

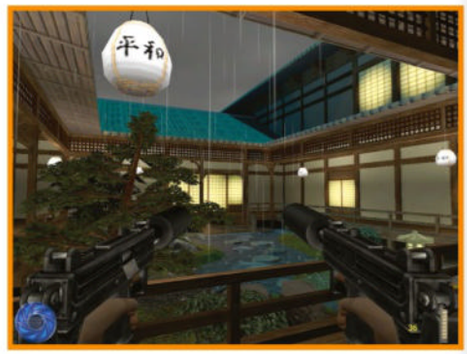
Jeff served as co-composer of *Nightfire*, scoring all of the game's entertaining driving levels. He has also provided additional music for subsequent *Bond* game *Everything Or Nothing* (2004). Based outside of Vancouver, Jeff mostly works within the city's thriving television industry, with numerous credits for Netflix and the Hallmark Channel.

» [Xbox] Plenty of *James Bond* movies have featured underwater sequences and *Nightfire* is no exception.

» [GameCube] It wouldn't be a *James Bond* game without a cool, funky gadget to abuse.



» [Xbox] After the success of the N64 game, it would be sacrilege to not feature a multiplayer option.



» [GameCube] It's time to get serious, so James pulls out his dual silencers.

Though not directly affiliated with the latest *Bond* film at the time, *Nightfire* borrows key elements from *Die Another Day*, with actor Pierce Brosnan's face digitally scanned for the game's primary character model. Players were even able to drive the latest *Bond* car, an Aston Martin Vanquish, in two separate missions.

As such, a large dose of inspiration for Jeff's score stems from David Arnold's *Bond* scores of the late-Nineties, specifically *Tomorrow Never Dies* and *The World Is Not Enough*. The influence of the latter soundtrack, in particular, can be heard in Jeff's *Nightfire* score. "I wanted it to sound like the Arnold scores and the John Barry scores," he confesses, referring to the long-serving *Bond* composer who defined the sound of the series from the 1960s to the 1980s. "Especially in the track *Enemies Vanquished*, there's a pretty blatant homage to the descending bassline from the main theme of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. I love that score so much, so it was a very aggressive nod!"

Operating on a steady diet of *Bond* scores for six months across his involvement with the game, the job came at a very fortuitous time as Jeff was then halfway through reading a John Barry biography. He had even been issued speeding fines in the past while blasting *Bond* soundtracks in his car.

While he hasn't met David Arnold in-person, he remains a huge fan of his. "This past year," Jeff says, "I bought a page of the score, like the fully notated score, for his piece *City Of Lovers* from *Casino Royale*. So I've got that up on my wall, and I just love what he did with the series. I listened to all the scores; just inhaled them, really."

At the time of speaking with Jeff, the big news within the *Bond* videogame universe is the launch of *Hitman* publisher IO Interactive's new title, *007 First Light*, slated for release in March 2026. While unable to share any insider secrets – "I haven't worked on games in quite a while," he discloses – Jeff remains hopeful for the future of the series, given 2012's flawed *007 Legends* was the last time players were given a *Bond* game.

"When the trailer dropped on YouTube, I thought it looked pretty promising. After the bar was set so high with some of Daniel Craig's work, I felt they had to do something different. So the idea of going for a young Bond for *First Light*, OK, well, I'm curious! I'm not 100% sold on it yet, but what I've seen in the game itself looks amazing."

Ultimately, Jeff's own affiliation within the *Bond* universe remains the work for which he is best-known today. It's a calling card he is happy to hold. "Of course, I've been working ever since, but that was such an exciting thing to be a part of," he reflects today. "It was a big deal for me. In hindsight, it's still pretty exciting. You know, my son is 14 now and recently started getting into *Bond* stuff within the last couple of years. Being able to say, 'Hey, I did this,' and just point that out to him… I'm proud of the work I did, and it's really cool to see that the game is still enjoyed."

THE MYTH OF NIGHTFIRE'S 'OFFICIAL' CD RELEASE

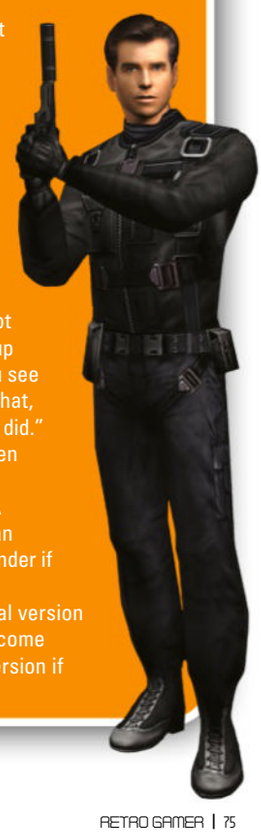
Jeff Tymoschuk on why fans won't find an official soundtrack

■ Fans of the game have long searched for a supposedly genuine, limited-edition pressing of the game's soundtrack. The truth is that it was just a sneaky Christmas gift made by the composer himself. Shortly after the game's initial console release, composer Jeff Tymoschuk unofficially made a series of albums as Christmas gifts for his family. "I burned all the CDs myself," Jeff recalls, "with all of the stuff I'd done on the game, and I sent it out to my family and people I knew. It was just to go, 'Hey, this is the thing I got to work on this year.'"

With the latest *Bond* film in cinemas at the time, interest in the franchise was at its height, and one of Jeff's gift albums went beyond their intended field of recipients. "Somewhere along the way," Jeff says, "one of those CDs got ripped and snuck its way up onto the internet. So if you see something claiming to be that, it's probably the one that I did."

Years later, Jeff was even shown an eBay listing of his homemade 'official' EA soundtrack release, with an $800 asking price! We wonder if anyone bought it.

You won't find an official version of *Nightfire*, but you may come across Jeff's unofficial version if you're very lucky.



THE MAKING OF

KILL.SWITCH

BEFORE GEARS OF WAR CEMENTED COVER-SHOOTING AS THE INDUSTRY'S STANDARD, THERE WAS KILL.SWITCH – A BOLD EXPERIMENT THAT MADE DUCKING BEHIND WALLS AS VITAL AS PULLING THE TRIGGER. DEVELOPED FAST AND ON A TIGHT BUDGET, IT QUIETLY BIRTHED MECHANICS THAT WOULD GO ON TO DEFINE MODERN SHOOTERS

WORDS BY YASSINE BAKRIM

IN THE KNOW

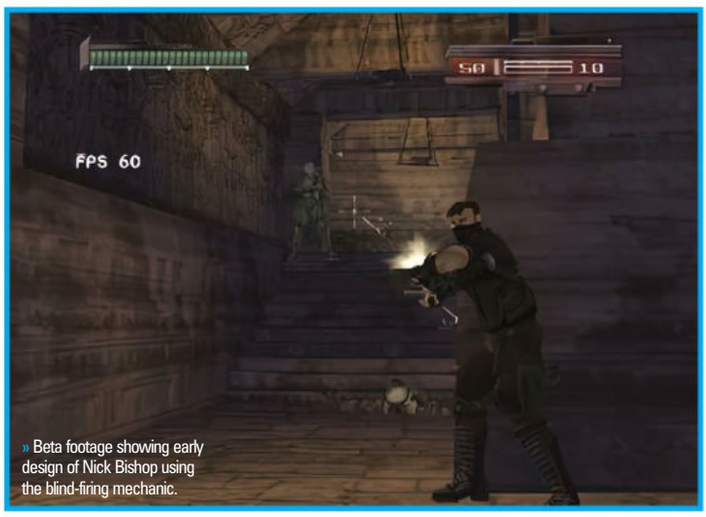
- **PUBLISHER:** SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT/ NAMCO HOMETEC
- **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO HOMETEC
- **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION 2, GBA, PC, XBOX
- **RELEASED:** 2003
- **GENRE:** COVER SHOOTER

You probably remember *kill.switch* as a distant, hazy memory – late nights spent popping out from behind cover, avoiding the risk of being shot in the face and blind-firing at goons. However, few players know how this obscure title came into existence.

The roots of *kill.switch* trace back to Namco Hometek's earlier title, *Dead To Rights*. Producers Matt Sentell and Chris Esaki were dissatisfied with its cover mechanics. That game embraced a hard-boiled cop ethos: run headlong into danger, guns blazing and pay no mind to cover. Chris and Matt envisioned the opposite. They wanted something different. Instead of another gung-ho hero spraying bullets, why not make cover the heart of the action?

"Chris Esaki and Matt Sentell both disliked *Dead To Rights* game's mechanics," lead programmer Gil Colgate recalls. "It was kind of a cross between a point-and-click adventure and a series of minigames, but we thought it would be cool if the game had real shooting mechanics."

Gil had been tinkering with a *Dead To Rights* prototype when he realised: what if cover wasn't optional? "Since the *Dead To Rights* character had one puzzle where he could take cover, I had an animation where he took cover behind a wall, and could shoot out, so I used it," he explains. The producers instantly loved this mechanic. "We riffed off from there and made *kill.switch*."



» Beta footage showing early design of Nick Bishop using the blind-firing mechanic.

» The early codename of *kill.switch* – *Loose Cannon*, where it all began.

Meanwhile, Chris explains to us how the idea played out. "Players could pop in and out of cover and trigger bullet time, diving in slow motion to target enemies. Using *Dead To Rights* assets, we threw this together in about a week." Matt Sentell later clarified that, while *kill.switch* may have been born after *Dead To Rights*, its true purpose was to reinvent the third-person shooter genre altogether.

Early on, the game was known as *Loose Cannon*. Unlike *Dead To Rights*, which chewed up two-and-a-half years and a considerable budget, *kill.switch* was greenlit as a small-budget game. "Namco's American branch at the time was looking for a profitable game to prove that the studio was a success," lead designer John Mundy remembers. "Sentell and Esaki dared to take up the challenge and opted for a small, very focussed game."

That focus was 'cover'. Namco's American branch needed to prove it could deliver, and this was its chance. Previous titles like *WinBack* and *Time Crisis* had already dipped a toe into the idea of ducking behind walls, but Namco Hometek wanted something meatier. Out of this drive came blind fire and corner-peeking – mechanics that would later become genre staples. But to execute this idea, the team needed inspiration.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MS PAC-MAN: MAZE MADNESS

PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 2000

DEAD TO RIGHTS (PICTURED)

PLATFORM: XBOX, VARIOUS

RELEASED: 2002

PAC-MAN WORLD 2

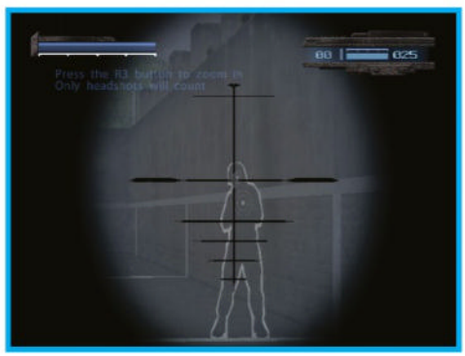
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION 2, GAMECUBE, PC, XBOX

RELEASED: 2002

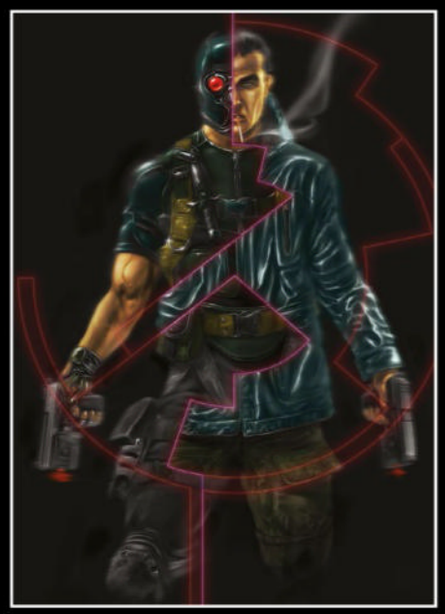
» [PlayStation 2] Flank them out of hiding and then shoot them in the face or knee.

» According to Alvin Muolic, the Duchess was *kill.switch*'s planned female character.

» [PlayStation 2] Though the budget Namco Hometek was given to make the game was small, the team improvised.



» [PlayStation 2] One of the great things about the game is that you can aim in first-person mode.



THE LOST SEQUEL

ALVIN MUOLIC REVISITS KILL.SWITCH'S MISSING SEQUEL

■ Producer Alvin Muolic once toyed with what he called a "true" sequel to *kill.switch* – one that expanded its universe without abandoning the original's DNA. His first pitch was a direct continuation, reuniting players with Bishop and Duchess alongside new operatives. The narrative, according to Alvin, was set years after the events of the first title, in a world where Engine technology – the augmentation that turned Bishop into a one-man army – had leaked onto the black market. No longer a government secret, the Engine was now pirated, modified and wielded by criminal syndicates and terrorist cells. The battlefield, once Bishop's alone, would be crawling with enhanced soldiers just like him.

His second pitch shifted the spotlight to a brand-new protagonist: Cross, a career criminal coerced into a clandestine program. After enduring the brutal augmentation process, Cross became another Engine-enhanced operative – but with none of Bishop's autonomy. Instead, he operated as a reluctant weapon of mass destruction, lavished with material spoils yet denied the very thing he craved most: freedom. The hook was cruelly ingenious: if Cross ever went rogue, his handlers could literally "pull the kill switch" erasing him at a moment's notice. The working title for this iteration was *kill.switch 2: CROSSFIRE*.

For influence, the team turned to Hollywood.

"*Black Hawk Down* was one of the key inspirations for the cover system," producer Alvin Muolic reveals, citing the film's intense gunfights as the perfect blueprint. Matt Sentell, on the other hand, vividly recalled one of the influences behind the game. "There were several inspirations at work. For the dive-roll, I kept referencing *NFL Blitz*. It needed to cover enough distance to dive away from grenades or into cover, so it had to be a bit over the top."

The result was a game that didn't just let you hide – it made hiding exciting. You weren't a mere Rambo who could charge recklessly into battle; you were a soldier clinging to cover, counting your bullets and praying for that sweet, perfect shot.

> "NAMCO'S AMERICAN BRANCH AT THE TIME WAS LOOKING FOR A PROFITABLE GAME TO PROVE THAT THE STUDIO WAS A SUCCESS"
> **JOHN MUNDY**

Gameplay may have come together smoothly, but the story was another pressing matter. Earlier in its infancy, *kill.switch* actually began as a shooter set in Vietnam. After all, this is what the executives at Namco Hometek demanded. "The executive suite at Hometek had wanted a Vietnam War game, and *Loose Cannon* was to be that project," Alvin explains. Early drafts flirted with *Apocalypse Now*-style horror, even a Nazi base hidden in the jungle. "*Loose Canon*'s story at the time was incomplete, but what was there was a hint of *Apocalypse Now*, a touch of horror and a hidden Nazi base," Alvin remembers.

However, this early direction didn't last long. "Shortly after I'd joined the team, there was a shift in the executive suite, and the driving force behind the Vietnam War game was now out," Alvin recalls. In retrospect, it was a blessing in disguise; the team was no longer confined to a single setting and could finally run wild and explore a smorgasbord of ideas. But freedom came at a cost. Everything had to be finished within a year. The clock was ticking.

Unfortunately, with just 12 months, their narrative arsenal was limited. Although the Vietnam War concept was abandoned, the team retained the core idea of war meets horror throughout development. From that point on, there was no time to waste. Prototypes came thick and fast, with multiple iterations taking shape almost immediately. "One concept involved a supernaturally powered soldier cursed to roam the earth, which gave us the regenerating health mechanic," Alvin says. "Another was a Hellboy/Indiana Jones ▶

» [PlayStation 2] Nick's blackouts helped hide the sudden transitions, masking the switch from one setting to another.

» [PlayStation 2] Cover is your ticket to survive – go rogue and you'll croak like a toad on the road.

alternate timeline in which the Nazis had won World War II. What we got out of this were more environments and smarter enemy AI."

Bits of science fiction and cyberpunk IPs like *Ghost In The Shell, The Matrix* and *RoboCop* also seeped into the mix, shaping the game's design and tone. By now, the story was finally starting to click together, but the dire situation was far from over. Budget restrictions loomed large over every decision. There was little money for CG tech or voice-overs, and no real tech for in-game cinematics. "I had to somehow fit the previously generated Vietnam War, WWII, and other art assets into the story," Alvin recalls. "I had minimal CG and voice-over budget. There was no tech in place for in-game cinematics, let alone any artists who could work on them."

Looking back, Alvin sees these limitations as a blessing. Sacrifices – including cutting a female character known as the Duchess – forced the team to think creatively and gave *kill.switch*'s narrative a flavour of its own. "I had a disjointed mix of modern-day levels, alt-history environments and Southeast Asia backdrops," Alvin says. "This gave me the idea that the protagonist suffered blackouts – masking abrupt shifts in setting and hinting that someone was controlling him behind the scenes, turning him on and off at the flick of a switch."

Just months before release, the team still lacked a competent engine for cutscenes. With barely any time left and a shoestring budget, they had to polish mechanics, craft a story and make a game that could compete with console giants. Every setback was an opportunity to get clever – or fail spectacularly.

> "AROUND FIVE MINUTES OF PRE-RENDERED CG FOOTAGE WAS STRETCHED OUT AND REPEATED ACROSS SEVERAL LEVELS, REVEALING MORE OF THE STORY"
> **ALVIN MUOLIC**

"Without an in-game cinematics engine or even any artists to support that effort, the story would have to be told through whatever CG movies we could afford, as well as extensive voice-over during gameplay," Alvin explains. Rather than spend money on lavish CGI or hire extra artists, the team improvised. "I opted to use what we could afford for in-between level cutscenes," Alvin recalls. "Around five minutes of pre-rendered CG footage was stretched out and repeated across several levels, revealing more of the story each time it was played."

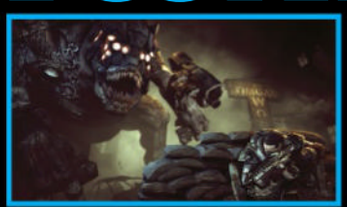
SEND ME COVER

KEY GAMES THAT FOLLOWED IN KILL.SWITCH'S WAKE

UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE

PLAYSTATION 3, 2007

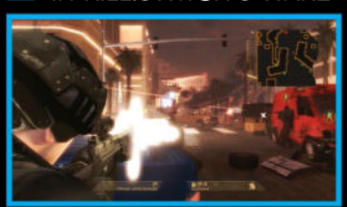
Naughty Dog's debut PS3 adventure married breezy platforming with cinematic gunfights. The cover system allowed Drake to pop up with quips as easily as bullets, ensuring firefights felt like a movie scene rather than a clunky shoot-out.



GEARS OF WAR

XBOX 360, PC, 2006

Epic Games didn't just borrow cover – it built an entire franchise around it. *Gears* transformed crouching behind waist-high walls into an art form, with weighty controls and gory executions cementing cover shooting as Xbox 360's flagship style of combat.



TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

XBOX 360, VARIOUS, 2006

Ubisoft redefined tactical gunplay with a slick cover mechanic that blended seamlessly with first-person and third-person perspectives. *Vegas* encouraged slow, methodical advances, making each firefight feel dangerous and deliberate, rather than a sprint-and-gun free-for-all.

BINARY DOMAIN

XBOX 360, PLAYSTATION 3, PC, 2012

Sega's underrated sci-fi shooter delivered destructible robots and squad banter, but its cover-based firefights carried *kill.switch*'s DNA. While it never reached blockbuster status, it showed how the mechanic could still drive tension in a futuristic setting.

» [PlayStation 2] Matt Sentell and Chris Esaki wanted players to value cover, hence adding plenty of surprises that force quick crawling to safety.

» *The Adversary* and *The Displacement: City Under Siege*, two follow-ups that didn't progress far. Credit: Namco & Jason Courtney.

» [PlayStation 2] Because of the tight budget, the team relied on RenderWare to power their game.

» [PlayStation 2] Matt Sentell mentioned they put great effort into balancing enemy AI to keep the action fair yet challenging.

» [Game Boy Advance] Namco and Visual Impact produced a rather interesting GBA iteration of *kill.switch*.

Namco Hometek's small team wrestled with tight deadlines and budgets to finally get *kill.switch* released – first on Xbox and PlayStation 2 in 2003, then PC and even a decent GBA port in 2004. Critics applauded its radical cover system and the intense firefights, though some criticised the short campaign and visuals. Commercially, it wasn't the hit Namco had hoped for. But history has been far kinder – *kill.switch*'s influence is woven into the DNA of modern shooters, from *Gears Of War*'s stop-and-pop gunfights to Nathan Drake clinging to crumbling walls in *Uncharted*.

» [PlayStation 2] If you can perfectly time out your shots, the game becomes insanely easy.

After *kill.switch* released, work began on a follow-up – but it wasn't as simple as slapping a number '2' on the box. Several concepts were explored, yet none progressed far. One of the earliest attempts was *The Adversary*, which was pitched as an evolution of *kill.switch* with a heavy focus on multiplayer and support for up to 16 players online. According to associate producer Scott Crisostomo, it was progressing well. "We even had a multiplayer demo running at an E3," Scott recalls. "We also pivoted to a game that used the core mechanics, but you were a pilot who could jump in and out of mechs. The mechs used cover mechanics too, but on a larger scale – using buildings as cover. We had a working prototype for that."

That prototype was another spin on the idea, known as *The Displacement: City Under Siege*. It promised mechs, espionage features, an improved cover system and even camouflage mechanics that let players blend into the environment. Like its predecessor, though, it didn't progress far into development.

Though these projects fizzled, Alvin still vividly recalls what *The Adversary* was all about. "*The Adversary*'s high concept was that of playing the bad guy and living out the fantasy lifestyle of one," he explains. Unlike *kill.switch*'s tagline "Take Cover, Take Aim, Take Over", both *The Adversary* and *The Displacement* leaned heavily on style. "In the game, you'd be able to play as a contract killer, assassin, special forces operative, or your own customised character. Its tagline was 'lead a killer lifestyle.'"

In the end, due to corporate restructuring, layoffs and Namco Hometek's political issues, the chance of a *kill.switch* successor evaporated. As designer John Mundy later observed, Namco simply wasn't interested in pursuing military shooters again. Hometek itself would soon vanish, and with it, any hope of a true *kill.switch* sequel was gunned down. It never became a blockbuster, but its influence is undeniable. Every modern shooter owes a nod to its cover system. And for a small team on a tight budget, that was a victory in itself.

Hardware Heaven

3DS

» **MANUFACTURER:** Nintendo » **YEAR:** 2011
» **COST:** £229.99 (launch), £85+ (today, boxed), £75+ (today, unboxed)

Following the enormous success of the DS, Nintendo didn't feel the need to reinvent the wheel. The 3DS employs the familiar clamshell design with vertically stacked dual displays, but both screens have a slightly higher resolution and the top screen is a slightly wider, glasses-free stereoscopic display. There are a couple of other visible changes – you get an analogue slider and a new Home button – but the primary changes are under the hood, as the 3DS is considerably more powerful than its predecessor.

The 3D display required a very steady hand, and developers ultimately decided it was surplus to requirements in many cases. Sales were initially slow due to its high price, but a cut to £149.99 helped to get the hardware moving, as did the formidable library of quality games that eventually built up. Though the 3DS never came close to matching the success of the original DS, selling through nearly 76 million units compared to 154 million, the handheld served as a vital lifeline that helped to earn Nintendo money while the Wii U struggled in the home-console market. *

3DS fact

■ There are six distinct models of the 3DS – the original model here, the 3DS XL, the 2DS, the New Nintendo 3DS, New Nintendo 3DS XL and New Nintendo 2DS.

PROCESSOR: 32-BIT DUAL-CORE ARM11 CPU (268MHZ), SINGLE CORE ARM9 CPU

GRAPHICS: DIGITAL MEDIA PROFESSIONALS PICA200 (268MHZ), STEREOSCOPIC 400X240 RESOLUTION TOP SCREEN, 320X240 BOTTOM SCREEN

POWER: 1300MAH LITHIUM ION RECHARGEABLE BATTERY, APPROX 3-5 HOURS PLAY TIME

OTHER: THREE 640X480 CAMERAS (ONE USER-FACING, TWO EXTERNAL-FACING)

STORAGE: 2GB EMMC, SD CARD (OPTIONAL)

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (UP TO 4GB)

RAM: 128MB FCRAM

SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

ESSENTIAL GAME

Super Mario 3D Land

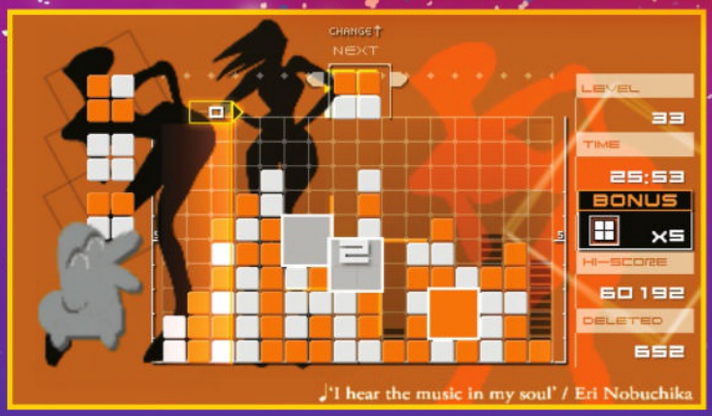
Do you love the way that Mario controls in 3D, but prefer the linear stages of the 2D *Mario* games? If so, this is the game for you, as it has you racing through stages in order to grab the flag at the end, rather than pursuing objectives in free-roaming environments. It's one of the very few games that really makes compelling use of the stereoscopic display, thanks to bonus rooms that utilise perspective tricks, and provided the basis for the design of *Super Mario 3D World* on Wii U and Switch.

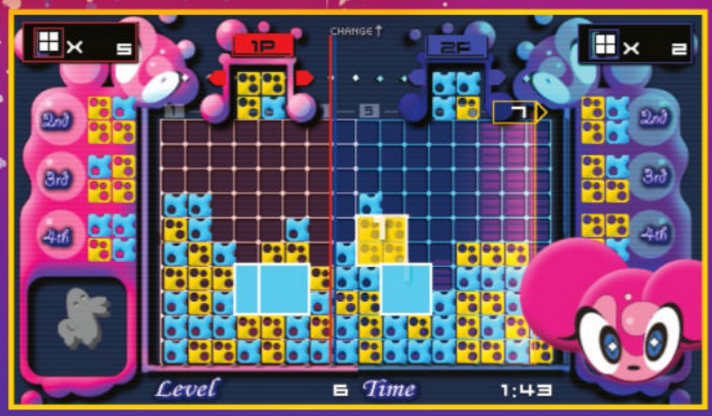
THE MAKING OF LUMINES PUZZLE FUSION

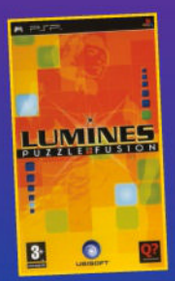
FOR OVER 20 YEARS, TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI HAS CHASED THE DREAM OF SYNESTHETIC GAMING WITH SUCH TITLES AS REZ, CHILD OF EDEN, TETRIS EFFECT AND LUMINES. WITH LUMINES ARISE JUST WEEKS AWAY, WE TALK TO THE LEGENDARY GAME CREATOR ABOUT THE MAKING OF HIS ORIGINAL MUSICAL PUZZLER

WORDS BY JAMES TOCCHIO

TRANSLATION ASSISTANCE FROM KYOKO YAMASHITA







IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** BANDAI (JPN), UBISOFT (NA/EU)
- **DEVELOPER:** Q ENTERTAINMENT
- **PLATFORM:** PSP
- **RELEASED:** 2004
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE

From his very first experience with videogames, playing the black-and-white *Pong* at a friend's house, Tetsuya Mizuguchi has always believed in the power of games to bring joy in ways unmatched by other media. "The gaming industry was just beginning," Mizuguchi tells us. He's speaking with us via video call from somewhere in Japan. While it's afternoon for him, our local time is fast approaching midnight yet we're happily sacrificing sleep to speak with the legendary games creator. "I studied media aesthetics," he says, "and I could foresee a future in which 3D technology will come, and real-time computer graphics, and maybe even a virtual reality type of technology, and I thought videogames might be an amazing new form, a new media, a very experiential medium."

During and after university, this nascent feeling that games were the new media was bolstered by a handful of formative experiences. The Bitmap Brothers' *Xenon 2* shaped Mizuguchi's belief that games, like the music videos of the Eighties which he so loved, could be a new vehicle for music and art. At the same time, the game centers of Japan hinted at a future in which games weren't just an audiovisual medium but could provide a fully immersive multi-sensory experience.

Sega's *R360*, an arcade cabinet from 1990, epitomised this idea. This unusual and innovative sit-down machine featured a ball-shaped cockpit which could rotate 360 degrees, and its four-point safety harness allowed players to strap in and rotate completely upside down to match the on-screen action. This motion simulator, paired with the cabinet's giant video screen and raucous sound system, brought incredible immersion to Sega's flight sim and racing games. Mizuguchi was impressed, telling us, "All the coolest arcade cabinets had the Sega logo, so I wanted to work with Sega."

> "ALL THE COOLEST ARCADE CABINETS HAD THE SEGA LOGO, SO I WANTED TO WORK WITH SEGA"
> **TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI**

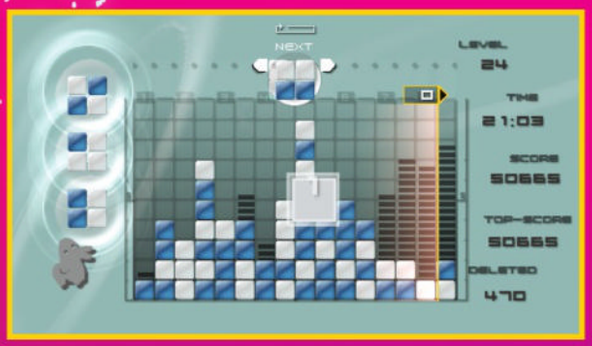
After a brief interview, Mizuguchi convinced Sega executive Hisashi Suzuki (interestingly, the first documented employee of Sega Japan) to bring him on board. "I wasn't shy about the kind of things I thought the company should be making," Mizuguchi says with a wry smile. "I said what I was interested in, and what I thought was not interesting, and I somehow convinced him that there was so much potential for creative tech in games.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

REZ (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: DREAMCAST, PS2
RELEASED: 2001

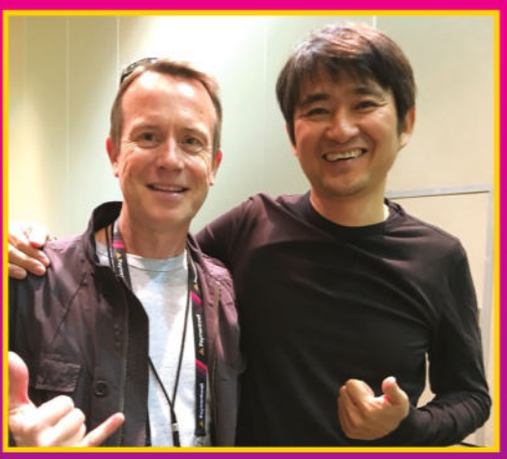
CHILD OF EDEN
PLATFORM: XBOX 360, PS3
RELEASED: 2011

TETRIS EFFECT
PLATFORM: PC, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 2018

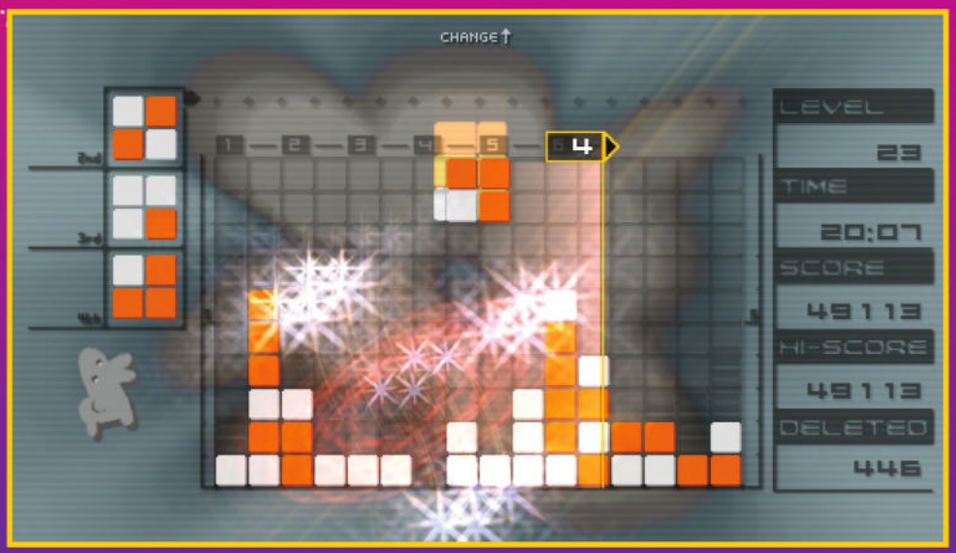


» [PSP] Some skins are intrinsically more difficult than others due to visual density.

» Mizuguchi attends the Video Game Awards in 2005, around the launch of *Lumines*.



» After presenting his GDC retrospective on *Rez*, Mizuguchi was surprised to meet Eric Matthews of The Bitmap Brothers.



» [PSP] Each skin has a distinct visual identity which carries over to backgrounds, blocks, music and effects.

And he basically said to me, 'You know, we need someone as crazy as you.'" Mizuguchi laughs at the memory. "So, they hired me."

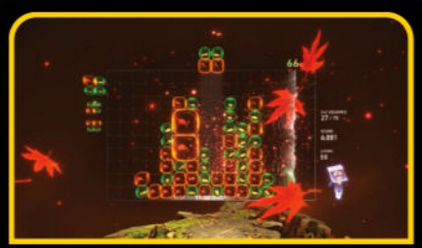
Mizuguchi's early days at Sega were spent working on internal projects and concepts for arcades, including augmented-reality tech powered by Game Gear innards, and arcade experiences like *Megalopolis*, a CGI film that worked with Sega's AS-1 hydraulic motion simulator. Next, he was producer of *Sega Rally Championship* and its sequel, then *Sega Touring Car Championship*, and in the mid-to-late-Nineties he was influential in Sega's development of the Dreamcast. It was during this time that Mizuguchi discovered, as he puts it, the type of game that he was meant to create.

» Tetsuya Mizuguchi (right) designed *Lumines* in 2004. Now CEO of Enhance, recent credits include producer/executive producer on *Tetris Effect*, *Humanity* and *Lumines Arise*.

"Where my interest lay was the merging of music and visuals, haptics and vibration, to create an experience that is more emotionally moving, like you're living and breathing this experience." Mizuguchi pauses and thinks before continuing. "And *Rez* really let me land. It allowed me to find myself in a way."

Rez was a musical rail-shooter and the first of Mizuguchi's unique synesthesia-themed games. It was ground-breaking for the way that its visuals and gameplay synched with the game's sound and music, and while it was an instant critical darling, it was abstract at a time in gaming history when abstraction was a liability, and it debuted late in the Dreamcast's life cycle. Consequently, *Rez* failed to find much of an audience. "I remember journalists saying *Rez* was so ahead of its time," Mizuguchi smiles. "But it was not a commercially successful game. It was what we would now call a cult classic. It was abstract, not just visually, but emotionally and not many games were made that way back then."

During Sega's post-Dreamcast restructuring, Mizuguchi went independent. Along with his Sega colleague Shuji Utsumi, he formed a new studio, Q Entertainment, and began dreaming up ways to bring more gamers into his world of synesthesia. "I had a kernel of an idea," he tells us. "I wanted to get my type of game to more people, and ▶



EXPERIENCE, SYNESTHESIA, AND KANDO

THE THREE PILLARS OF MIZUGUCHI'S DESIGN PHILOSOPHY EXPLAINED

When we asked Mizuguchi what it feels like to go back and revisit his classic games, in some cases more than 20 years after he first dreamed them up, his answer was characteristically more philosophical than technical. "There's a reason we've decided to bring *Lumines* back, and it's all about making a new experience. It was the same with *Rez* and *Rez Infinite*," he says. "We wanted to revisit *Rez* and bring a whole new experience. For us, experience is king and synesthesia is queen. But above that is a word we use in Japanese called Kando, which means 'emotions' or how we share a moving experience. Of course we want our games to be fun, and we love to create new experiences. But to us, these things are not just games or products. Our hope is that when you play or experience our games, you discover something about your own emotions and experiences. Whether it's through rhythms or vibrations, or you discover your own way of feeling a flow state, or you have this euphoric sort of moment, our hope is that it's not just about how much fun you have, but that there's so much more meaning to it."

» During the Dreamcast era, Mizuguchi headed United Game Artists and produced *Space Channel 5* and *Rez*.

▶ people love puzzle games, so I wondered if I could somehow fit a musical synesthetic experience into a puzzle game. And right around that time, Sony announced the PSP. Kutaragi-san [former chairman and CEO of Sony Computer Entertainment] called it 'an interactive Walkman' and this became a huge source of inspiration."

Mizuguchi and just two colleagues put together a prototype in which falling blocks of different colours would drop and collect on a game board while a musically synched 'Time Line' would sweep across and erase any matched blocks. With this prototype, *Lumines* was born. "We felt like this was it," he recalls. "It was perfect for what I wanted to see in my next game. An approachable puzzle game with no wasted mechanics, with a musical element, too. It didn't require as much from the player, like *Rez* may have, and something about the rhythm and pacing just felt good."

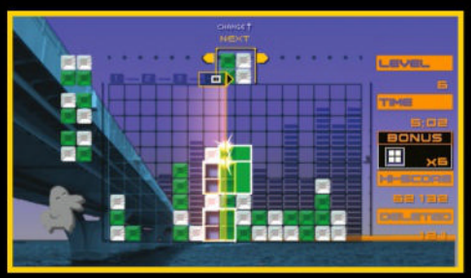
» A creative chat during the development of *Rez Infinite*. Shown is Mizuguchi with art director Takashi Ishihara.

"EVERYTHING IS GAMEPLAY AND MUSIC, TOGETHER WITH A BALANCED MARRIAGE OF ELEMENTS"
TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI

In *Lumines: Puzzle Fusion*, 2x2 blocks made up of squares of colours fall onto a playfield. These blocks can be positioned by the player so that the coloured squares land where desired, with the object of the game being to create and eliminate 2x2 (or greater) blocks of matching colours.

At the same time, a vertical line called the Time Line sweeps across the playing area and erases any matched squares. But this mechanic isn't random. It's folded into the musical core of the game, since the Time Line travels in sync with the game's music, married to the tempo or beat of the current stage's song. Further adding to the musical tapestry are the player's actions, such as moving a block left or right, dropping it into place, or clearing blocks, as these all create unique sound effects which are synched with (and thus, help to create) the game's music. "We named this gameplay 'call and response,'" Mizuguchi tells us. "You drop something and then something comes and takes action, and you get into this flow state of repeated sequencing, like a pacing or a groove, and it feels so good."

MASTERING LUMINES



THINK IN BLOCKS

■ *Lumines*' core mechanic is all about creating 2x2 (minimum) squares, or clusters of squares and rectangles. Instead of thinking in rows or columns, think in block structures and build. Once you've got a 2x2 square, try to increase its area before the Time Line sweeps it away.

TIME THE DROP

■ *Lumines* is a musical puzzler, and timing is everything. The Time Line marks the tempo and sweeps away any 2x2 or greater blocks that you've made. Sometimes it's better to hold a block momentarily to make a big move on the next sweep of the line.

USE THE GIMMICKS

■ Each game in the *Lumines* series introduces its own unique mechanic and twist on the formula. The PS Vita's *Electronic Symphony*, for example, gives you user-selectable avatars with special moves, such as the ability to temporarily freeze the Time Line. Learn your game's unique gimmick and use it.

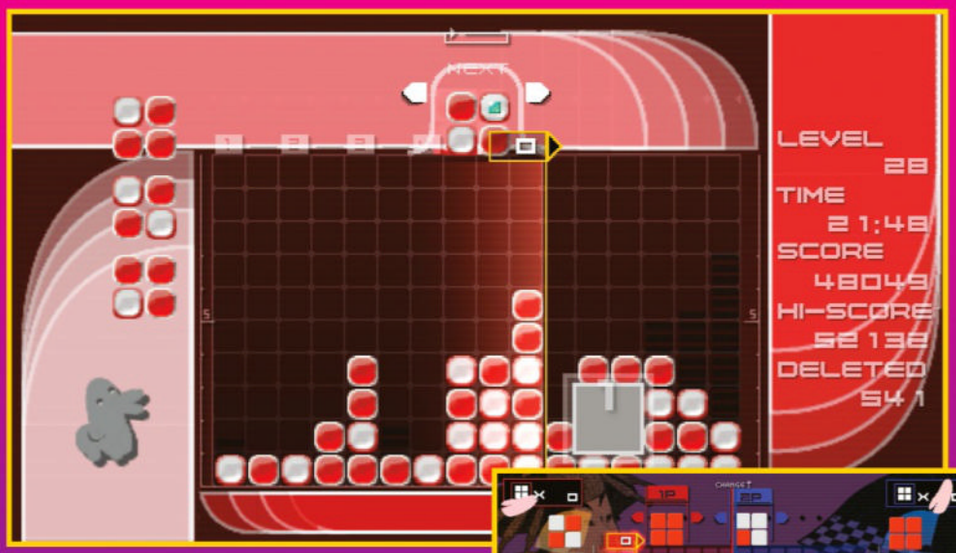
Each stage in *Lumines* has its own skin and soundtrack, an overall theme which completely transforms the look and sound of the game with every successfully completed stage. In the game's main mode, called Challenge mode, once you've cleared enough blocks and earned enough points, the game seamlessly shifts to the next stage, which also unlocks a new skin. Whenever this happens, the music changes as if you're listening to an album. The song ends and a new one begins, the game's blocks and squares change colour and shape, the background changes, and you continue with totally new visuals, new sound effects, and new music.

As the game continues, stages become more difficult. The songs have a higher BPM or the blocks fall at a faster rate, or the Time Line travels slower, or all these difficulties happen at once, demanding faster reactions and more planning. The game only ends when the player loses for allowing a block to touch the top of the playfield.

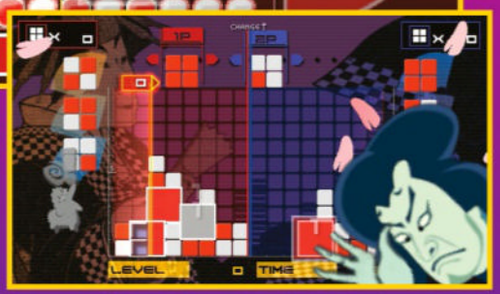
Rounding out the gameplay options are a two-player mode, a Vs CPU mode which interestingly cuts the game board in half and features a sort of tug-of-war mechanic in which combos make your opponent's side of the board smaller (and therefore, more difficult), and a Puzzle mode in which you're tasked with stacking blocks in order to make shaped patterns, like a cross, a dog, and more complex designs.

While later levels and challenges can become frantic, as is the case with most stacking-type puzzle games, *Lumines* rarely loses its spark. When you fail, starting over is sort of a joy in the same way that it's nice to put your favourite album on repeat. When the music is great and the visuals are nice, playing *Lumines* repeatedly is simply fun. "There was no waste in the way this game was made," Mizuguchi says. "The Time Line works as a gameplay element, but it's also a musical element. Moving pieces is gameplay, but also musical. Everything is gameplay and music, together with a balanced marriage of elements."

Combining all those elements together certainly appealed to gamers of the time. "We found that *Lumines* appealed to a large audience, and that the synesthesia was working in such a way that it was approachable," says Mizuguchi. "It was an easier to understand game than, for



» [PSP] This stage is particularly challenging due to the squares' similar colouring.



» [PSP] Versus CPU mode is a single-player mode which simulates two-player puzzle battles.

» Mizuguchi with DJ Ken Ishii, whose music has appeared in *Lumines* and *Rez*

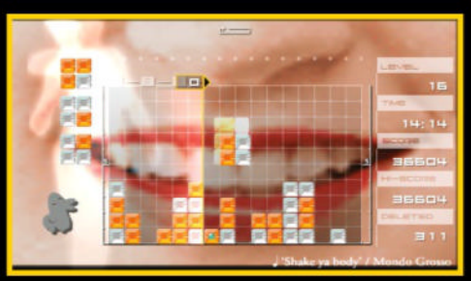
TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR BECOMING A LUMINES LUMINARY

SPECIAL BLOCKS

■ Special blocks sometimes appear. When you form a square with these blocks, a chain reaction is set off so that all blocks of the same colour that are connected to the original square are cleared from the game board. Use these to make big moves.

CLEAR THE BOARD

■ A perfect clear happens when you wipe the grid completely. This is rare but hugely rewarding. Look for opportunities when the board is low and manageable, and look ahead to the pieces waiting in the queue. Planning moves in advance is crucial to a perfect clear.

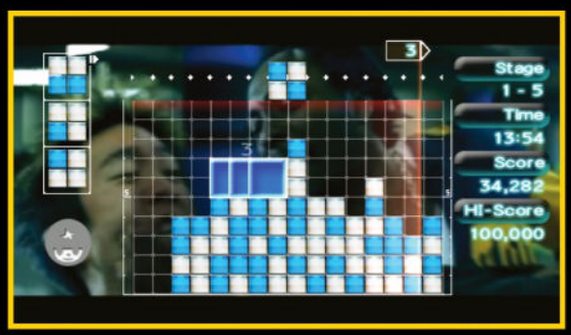


GO WITH THE FLOW

■ Remember that *Lumines* is just a game. While chasing high scores and reaching that next stage is rewarding, some of the best *Lumines* experiences happen when we simply chill, enjoy the game's music and abstract visuals, and let the Time Line dissolve the stress of the day.

LUMINES EVOLVED

TWO DECADES OF LUMINES' MUSICAL PUZZLES

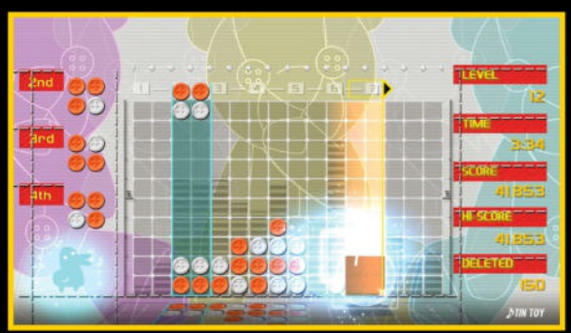


LUMINES II

■ *Lumines*' sequel released on the PSP in 2006. The game added a Mission mode, Skin Editor and introduced dynamic music videos as backgrounds from such American musicians as Missy Elliott and Beck. Mizuguchi's own virtual band, Genki Rockets, contributed their well-loved song, *Heavenly Star*.

LUMINES: ELECTRONIC SYMPHONY

■ Released in 2012 on the PS Vita, *Electronic Symphony* has been called by some journalists "the best in the series". It added new game modes, character avatars with special abilities, new types of puzzle blocks and optional touch controls. All this, plus an always killer soundtrack.

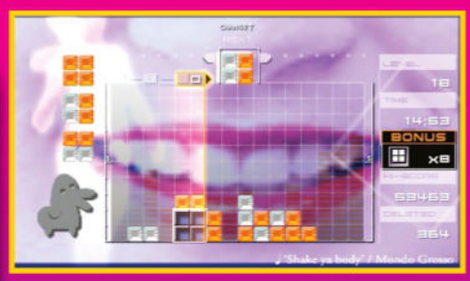


LUMINES REMASTERED

■ This 2018 release importantly included Nakamura's original high-bitrate music, which had previously been down-sampled for the original PSP version. Mizuguchi and his team also added a feature in which up to eight additional controllers can be placed on the player's body to experience haptic feedback during gameplay.

LUMINES ARISE

■ The latest game from Mizuguchi and his colleagues, *Lumines Arise*, releases in November 2025. This newest entry offers a stunning evolution of *Lumines'* gameplay while adding a new Burst mechanic, online multiplayer and optional VR support. We've played it, and it's phenomenal.



» [PSP] Part of the challenge is not being distracted by the ever-changing video backgrounds.

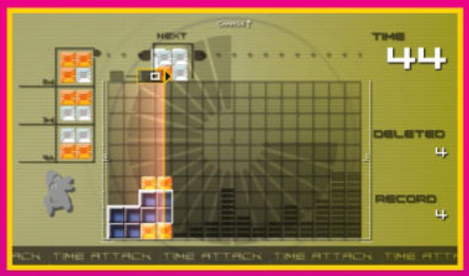
example, *Rez*. It didn't require the player to have a high level of game skill and even though it's a music-heavy game, you don't have to have rhythm. You feel like you're a very rhythmic person, but it was the game making you feel that way."

***Lumines: Puzzle Fusion* released in December, 2004 alongside Sony's PSP.** This new handheld device was not just a game console. It was a music player, a portable television and home theatre, a camera, an internet browser, and even a GPS navigation device. With its approachable vibe, its casual pick-up-and-play gameplay, and its music-centric ethos, *Lumines* was a perfect launch game for a portable multimedia system like the PSP.

"We tend to forget that the Walkman didn't have a screen before," Mizuguchi says, reminiscing about the launch of Sony's PSP. "But the PSP comes and it's literally a Walkman with a screen and a headphone jack, and you can put on a pair of headphones and it's like you're connected to a music device, but you can watch something, or play a game anywhere, anytime. And this inspired me."

That inspiration clearly struck a nerve with gamers, as *Lumines* garnered high scores and sold really well. "I think *Lumines* stood out because many of the PSP's launch titles were ports or very similar versions of existing PlayStation 2 games. But *Lumines* was original in the way that it was specifically made for the new hardware," offers Mizuguchi as a reason for the game's popularity. "It was made for the PSP, and for a general audience. It was approachable so

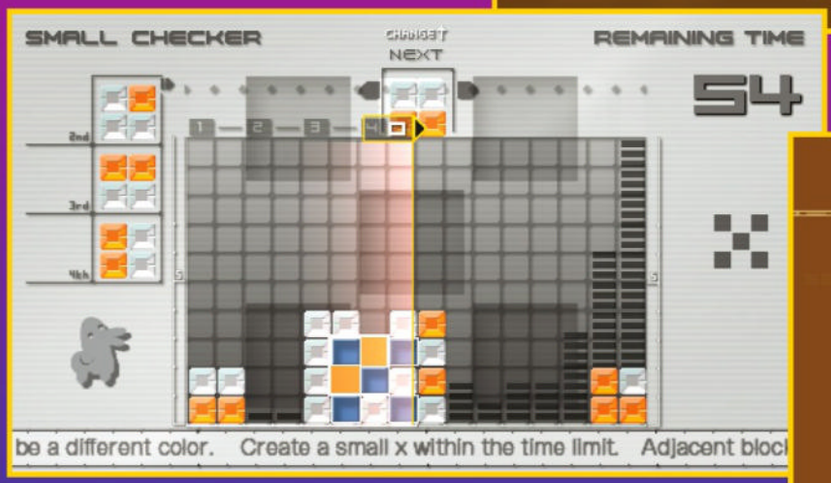
» [PSP] There are nearly 30 unique skins in the game, unlocked through various achievements.



» [PSP] Time Attack mode tasks the player with erasing as many blocks as possible in a set time.

» [PSP] Play enough *Lumines* and you're sure to discover a favourite skin.

» [PSP] It's hard to beat the excitement of clearing a large swathe of blocks in one sweep.



» [PSP] Here you see your correspondent, in full panic mode.

» [PSP] Some puzzle mode challenges are more puzzling than others.

people would want to pick it up and play it."

And people played it. The original *Lumines* was an early success for Sony's handheld, moving over 500,000 units in just a few months. The game won numerous awards in 2005, including GameSpot's PSP Game Of The Year award and *EGM*'s Handheld Game Of The Year, while *Game Informer* listed it among 2005's top 50 games overall. A Greatest Hits release soon followed, as well as a port to PlayStation 2, and many years later in 2018, a remaster.

In the two decades following the original game's release, a half-dozen *Lumines* sequels have dropped onto numerous platforms, and each of these new games brings interesting and unique elements to the puzzler's impressive core.

***Lumines II* expanded the audiovisual connection by having stages which played full-length music videos from artists like Missy Elliott and Fatboy Slim, and allowed players to create their own music via the Sequencer mode.** The Xbox 360's *Lumines Live!* introduced online multiplayer, while the PS Vita's *Lumines: Electronic Symphony* added seamless touch controls along with special-powered avatars.

Now, Mizuguchi and his colleagues are looking forward to the release of the latest game in the series, *Lumines Arise*. Announced during Sony's summer State Of Play, the new game arrives in just a few weeks' time for PlayStation 5 and PC. More than just a visual refresh, *Arise* is an attempt to amplify the emotional undercurrent so often found in Mizuguchi's games.

For Mizuguchi, returning to the series is not nostalgic or retrospective. Rather, it's an opportunity to once again use technology to share his vision. *Lumines Arise* is the first game in the series to be playable in virtual reality, a platform that Mizuguchi and his teams have previously used to create incredible immersion in *Rez: Infinite* and *Tetris Effect*. "I always approach my work hoping to make something simple," Mizuguchi says. "So that the game design is timeless even after ten years, twenty years, and people can go back and feel that it's not an old and dated game. It helps us keep building new experiences. "It's like what we did with *Tetris Effect*. You can say that *Tetris* is a complete game, but does that mean it stops evolving? Or are there other layers of magic that you can sprinkle on this already great game that's going to make it more emotionally potent? That's our secret recipe, our magic that we added to *Tetris*, and that's our ideal."

There's another reason why Mizuguchi's games feel like they do. "By making something simple and timeless, I think it allows us to keep the doors open and welcoming for new technology. We are going to bring you something that feels like what you played before but it's going to multiply that feeling," Mizuguchi says. "I feel like what we've done is only the beginning of something wonderful to come." ★

> "BY MAKING SOMETHING SIMPLE AND TIMELESS, I THINK IT ALLOWS US TO KEEP THE DOORS OPEN AND WELCOMING FOR NEW TECHNOLOGY"
> **TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI**

Takedo
SILVER AT
6
5
ONCOMING

Burnout Dominator

HEY, HEY, YOU, YOU, I DON'T LIKE YOUR SOUNDTRACK

» RETROREVIVAL

» PLAYSTATION 2 » 2007 » EA UK

Though *Burnout*'s particular style of combat racing always packs a punch, there are a lot of people who don't particularly love *Burnout Dominator*, and I can understand why. Dropping the popular Crash mode was always going to upset fans, and the linear structure of the challenges did feel like a bit of a step back from previous games. Despite all that, I really enjoy some of the other changes EA UK made for the game. I felt like the Traffic Checking mechanic from *Burnout Revenge* made driving in the right lane too safe, so I'm happy that it doesn't feature in *Dominator*, and I love that the developers reintroduced chaining Burnouts because it encourages you to take some huge risks.

While I wouldn't say that it has any of my favourite bands on it, the soundtrack does the job too. I'd started buying *Metal Hammer* around the time the game came out, and the magazine's cover CDs had made me familiar enough with the likes of Shadows Fall and Trivium, and I've got a couple of Filter albums so I appreciate the *Hey Man, Nice Shot* remix. There's one aspect of the soundtrack that I never enjoyed, though – Avril Lavigne's song *Girlfriend* irritates me, and it's on this soundtrack in its original English, plus Spanish, Japanese and Mandarin versions too.

My distaste for the song didn't escape the notice of a housemate, who loaded up my save while I was out one day, went into the Options menu and turned off every track *except* the four versions of *Girlfriend*. Naturally, the next time I went to play the game and *Girlfriend* started to play, I hit L2 to skip the track and a different version played. Bad luck, I assumed – only to try again, get more Avril Lavigne and finally realise I'd been the victim of a prank. I probably vowed revenge. Whether or not I got it is a fact lost to time. ✱

RETRORATED

>> This month we walk the mist-filled fields and deserted alleyways of Silent Hill F, delve into the new Bubsy collection, go for a round of golf and check out Blaze's latest Evercade cartridges

» [Xbox Series X] As with previous *Silent Hill* games, running is often a better option to fighting.

Silent Hill F

KONAMI FINDS ITS ROOTS

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** XBOX SERIES S/X
- **ALSO ON:** PC, PLAYSTATION 5
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £69.99
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** NEOBARDS ENTERTAINMENT
- **BUY IT FROM:** ONLINE, RETAIL
- **PLAYERS:** 1

It's a brave developer that takes on a revered series like *Silent Hill*, but Neobards Entertainment certainly hasn't shirked from the challenge.

While *Silent Hill F* doesn't quite reach the dizzying heights of Team Silent's original trilogy, this is an assured addition to the series that, whilst not always looking or playing like a *Silent Hill* game, absolutely *feels* like one.

Silent Hill F takes place in Ebisugaoka, a quiet rural village in Sixties Japan and follows Shimizu Hinako, a young woman who meets up with her friends after having another argument with her parents. It's not long before their tranquillity is disturbed by grotesque-looking monsters and an unsettling growth of Red Tiger Lilies that consume everything in their path. With the village getting overgrown, Hinako soon gets separated from her friends and finds herself in a mysterious place called the Dark Shrine. Tended by a mask-wearing stranger she's told not to trust, Hinako soon finds herself flipping between the village and the Dark Shrine as she attempts to reconnect with her friends.

If all that sounds a long way from a traditional *Silent Hill* game you're absolutely right, but the nods to the long-running series are all present and correct and masterfully unfold as the game continues. In many ways this could be considered a brand-new survival horror game from Konami,

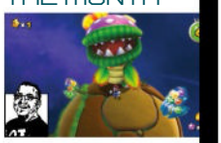
» [Xbox Series X] While exploration is fairly linear, you'll still find interesting things hidden away.

» [Xbox Series X] Upgrading abilities gets needlessly difficult due to the required Emas being so hard to find.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Konami's original *Silent Hill* debuted in 1999 and proved to be a hit with survival horror fans who enjoyed its immersive story and nightmare-fuel enemies. Three more Team Silent sequels followed on PlayStation 2, with later games being developed by Western developers. *Silent Hill F* is the first home release since *Downpour* in 2012.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN

Super Mario Galaxy + Super Mario Galaxy 2

They're certainly not cheap and little has been done to them, but there's no denying both games are still brilliant to play.

NICK

Bubsy In: The Purrfect Collection

I had more fun than I expected with this - but that's probably because I played the first game a lot when I was young.

» [Xbox Series X] Kera's monster and character designs are great, effortlessly recapturing the grotesque, sexualised imagery of *Silent Hill 2*

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SILENT HILL 2

▼ SOMETHING NEW
SILENT HILL 2 (REMAKE)

as so much of it feels new and different from past games in the series, but as play continues the usual *Silent Hill* themes push their way to the surface.

While *Silent Hill F* features the same clunky combat of the earlier games it does add numerous new mechanics to the core gameplay. The biggest introduction is a *Dark Souls*-style Stamina bar which depletes whenever Hinako runs or uses a weapon. Additionally, a Sanity bar is also introduced which allows her to pull off powerful focus attacks that can cause staggering amounts of damage – providing they connect of course. Weapons are now degradable as well meaning Hinako must search out new ones or repair her limited arsenal with Toolkits. Hinako can also dodge attacks, but as with attacking, this evasive manoeuvre devours stamina (a perfect dodge however will immediately refill the bar).

All of Hinako's bars can be replenished by snacking on various foods or using items like first-aid kits and painkillers. She can also seek out Omamories which grant a number of passive skills, from additional health to the ability to increase weapon durability. Shrines are also dotted throughout the game and provide the ability to save progress, as well as enhance Hinako's abilities. Many of the items found in the game can be Enshrined, which lets Hinako trade them in for Faith, which can then be used to permanently increase her various skills as well as the number of Omamories she can equip at once (up to three).

Silent Hill F is easily the most combat-focussed game in the series, particularly when a key plot point develops later in the game, but that doesn't mean Neobards has forgotten the series' love of puzzles. Sadly, they're not quite as well implemented as in earlier games. There's still some great environmental clues but some of them feel a little too obtuse, while the rest feel laughably easy to solve.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Neobards' game is in how well it captures the bleak atmosphere and oppressive themes of earlier titles in the series. Small-town Americana may have been replaced with mist-filled fields and ominous-looking shrines, and the locations of the other world Hinako explores are distinctly different, rather than the decrepit, rust-filled distortions of areas characters had previously walked in earlier games, but that doesn't matter.

The psychological terror and bleak, unsettling tones of the original Team Silent games and horrendous creature designs have been nailed, largely thanks to an excellent story from Ryukishi07, which tackles suicide, child abuse, the freedom of choice, gender discrimination and numerous other adult themes. It's all woven together in a deliciously dark tapestry that makes Hinako one of the most fleshed out protagonists that we've had in the series. The music (which features original composer Akira Yamaoka) also captures the feel of the earlier games.

Silent Hill F certainly isn't perfect due to some pacing issues, an unwelcome focus on combat as the game ends and little to tie it narratively to earlier games, but it does prove that there's still plenty of life in the long-running series. ✱

In a nutshell

A genuinely great adventure with mature themes, gruesome antagonists and a sweeping, haunting score. It's easily the best new *Silent Hill* since the original trilogy.

>> Score **83%**

» [Xbox Series X] Inventory management in *Silent Hill F* is fiddly to use and requires a lot of manipulation.

» [Xbox Series X] The presentation of the game's lore is superb, from puzzle hints to monster clues.

» [Xbox Series X] Don't let monsters get too close as they can inflict huge damage.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Bubsy In: The Purrfect Collection

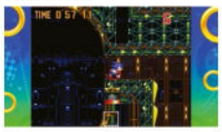
INFORMATION

- **FORMAT:** PC
- **ALSO ON:** PS5, XBOX SERIES S/X, SWITCH
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £16.75
- **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
- **DEVELOPER:** LIMITED RUN GAMES
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

▼ SOMETHING NEW
SONIC ORIGINS



BRIEF HISTORY

» Back in 1993, *Bubsy In: Claws Encounters Of The Furred Kind* introduced Accolade's wise-cracking bobcat to kids around the world. The game did well enough to earn sequels and even a cartoon pilot, but diminishing returns set in quickly. The series was revived in 2017 and acquired by Atari in 2023, with a brand-new 3D platformer titled *Bubsy 4D* set to launch in the first half of 2026.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind Bubsy In: The Purrfect Collection

» Additional features include a CRT display filter, rewind mode and a single save state per game.

» The fan game *Bubsy 3D: Bubsy Visits The James Turrell Retrospective* was considered but ultimately not included.

» The cartoon pilot included was originally shown through syndication in the US on Thanksgiving in 1993.

THE SCORE TELLS HALF THE TAIL

Meme culture can be harsh – just ask Bubsy. If you were to believe everything you read on the internet, the bobcat's adventures constitute the worst videogame franchise ever. To some extent, we get it. There's no doubt that the character can be grating, thanks to vocal quips that seemed like a cute idea in the development room. Yes, *Bubsy 3D* was an unmitigated disaster. However, reviews of the 16-bit games paint a picture of a platform mascot that didn't compare to Mario or Sonic, but provided a decent experience once you'd worn those classics out. With that in mind, there are bound to be players who have legitimate affection for Bubsy.

So what's here? You get all of Bubsy's Nineties games with the exception of the PC version of the first game, with solid emulation via the Carbon Engine. There's a music player, a museum section filled with artwork, concept sketches and even merchandise photography. The video content is the cherry on top, as you get developer interviews, the pilot episode of the *Bubsy* cartoon and a look at a *Bubsy 3D* prototype. There's even an explanation of the Japanese puns in the Super Famicom game by the collection's producer, Audi Sorlie.

Unfortunately, it's not too hard to pick faults with the original games. Though Bubsy has nine lives, in the first game a single hit or a fall from a high place is all it takes to lose one – and

» [PC] We applaud the effort made to make *Bubsy 3D* more playable, but there's only so much you can polish.

» [PC] The original *Bubsy* can provide decent fun, after a period of adjustment to the controls.

because the character physics never feel quite right, it's all too easy to run into something you don't mean to. *Bubsy II* remedies this by ditching the one-hit kills and slightly improving the physics, but we feel the level design isn't quite as coherent. If you can get past those quirks, it's perfectly possible to have fun with the Mega Drive and SNES games, especially if you do have genuine nostalgia for them.

» [PC] If you're a *Bubsy* fan, exploring the museum content will be a real treat.

The others fare even worse. Jaguar owners were disappointed that *Bubsy In: Fractured Furry Tales* didn't look like a significant upgrade over the 16-bit games, but in the present day you'll be disappointed by the fact that it doesn't play as well as either of them. *Bubsy 3D* is actually present in two forms – its miserable original presentation, as well as an updated version with widescreen display and improved controls, including camera control. It's all well implemented, but even this admirable effort can only do so much to salvage such an ugly, bland game.

That leaves us with a tricky collection to score. Even the best games on offer are only decent, and the worst ones are wretched, but a lot of care and attention has gone into giving them the best presentation possible and that effort deserves recognition. If you're a *Bubsy* fan and you know what you're getting yourself into, this offers just about everything that you could want, and comes recommended. For everyone else, it's a harder sell.

In a nutshell

A fantastic collection of middling to awful games. Old fans will get a kick out of it, and curious platform enthusiasts may too – but remember what curiosity did to the cat.

>> **Score 70%**

YOUR GAME IS NOT OVER

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PICK OF THE MONTH

Evercade: Multi-Game Cartridges

» **System:** Evercade family » **Buy it for:** £19.99 each » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

The latest two Evercade collections from Blaze highlight 18 games from Taito's extensive arcade library and include plenty of iconic titles. *Taito Arcade 1* is up first and the nine-game collection features a good selection of games. The highlights include *Bubble Bobble*, *Growl*, *Don Doko Don*, *Colony 7* and *Space Invaders*, with the remaining games being *The Legend Of Kage*, *Chack'n Pop*, *Pirate Pete* and *Raimais*.

Taito Arcade 2 is another solid mix of acclaimed and esoteric titles and it's also the cartridge we've constantly found ourselves going back to. We've

wasted a lot of time on *Liquid Kids*, *Rastan*, *The NewZealand Story*, *Volified* and *Operation Wolf*, while *Alpine Ski*, *Elevator Action*, *Kiki Kaikai* and *The Electric Yo-Yo* also hold up well. There's a far better mix of different genres on this second cartridge, although we did notice a weird sound glitch once while playing *The NewZealand Story*. There's also no option to alter the speed of the cursor in *Operation Wolf* from what we could see either.

As you'd expect, the emulation on all 18 games is of a good quality and both cartridges feature the normal save states and other options, as well as some lovely colour manuals. It still feels we should be getting more games on these compilations, particularly when you consider the vast size of Taito's arcade library, but both collections of games do justify their £20 price tags. While we'd argue

that *Taito Arcade 2* is definitely the stronger cartridge, four of its nine games will be included on the incoming Taito edition of the Evercade Alpha, so that's worth keeping in mind.

>> Score 78%

>> Score 84%

» [Evercade] *Bubble Bobble*, *Growl* and *The Legend Of Kage* all feature on the incoming Taito Evercade Alpha.

» [Evercade] It's not as polished as M2's recent collection, but *Operation Wolf* plays surprisingly well with a pad.

Super Mario Galaxy + Super Mario Galaxy 2

» **System:** Switch 2 (tested), Switch » **Buy it for:** £58.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

Two of the greatest 3D platformers of all time return with a rather hefty price tag. This is the second time that *Super Mario Galaxy* has appeared on the Switch but it has been suitably improved over that version with better visuals, an extra chapter in Rosalina's picture book and a music soundtrack to listen to. *Super Mario Galaxy 2* (our favourite of the two) looks even better and comes with similar extras, including a brand-new book. Grabbing stars with the new Joy-Cons isn't as accurate as on the original Wii releases, but still works fine with the gyroscopic controls. While that price will feel high for many, the quality of the games is absolutely timeless.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score 90%

Everybody's Golf: Hot Shots

» **System:** PC (version tested), PS5, Switch » **Buy it for:** £34.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail (PS5 and Switch only)

This classic golf series has been away from the course for a while, but it's back with a new developer, Hyde. *Everybody's Golf* has always been a more casual, accessible take on the sport and this entry is no different – getting into the game is intuitive and the anime-style characters are appealing. That's good, because you'll be following their stories in the World Tour mode, which is but a part of the wealth of content for solo players, while the power-up enhanced Wacky Golf is great with friends. Unfortunately, noticeable performance stutters and unhelpful camera angles do put a dampener on what is otherwise a strong return effort.

NICK THORPE

>> Score 80%

Puzzle Quest: Immortal Edition

» **System:** PC (tested), PS4, PS5, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £11.99 » **Buy it from:** Online, retail

The classic match 3 RPG battler is back in a definitive form and it remains just as hellishly compelling as before. In terms of extras it features 4K visuals (on supported systems), all of the game's expansion packs, a brand-new character class, extra quests and over 40 brand-new items. It retains the same classic gameplay, so you explore an overworld meeting NPCs, gaining quests and growing your citadel, while combat takes the form of match 3 battles. The AI feels a little unfair at times and the user interface can be a little fiddly to navigate, but there's no denying it remains as more-ish as ever.

DARRAN JONES

>> Score 81%

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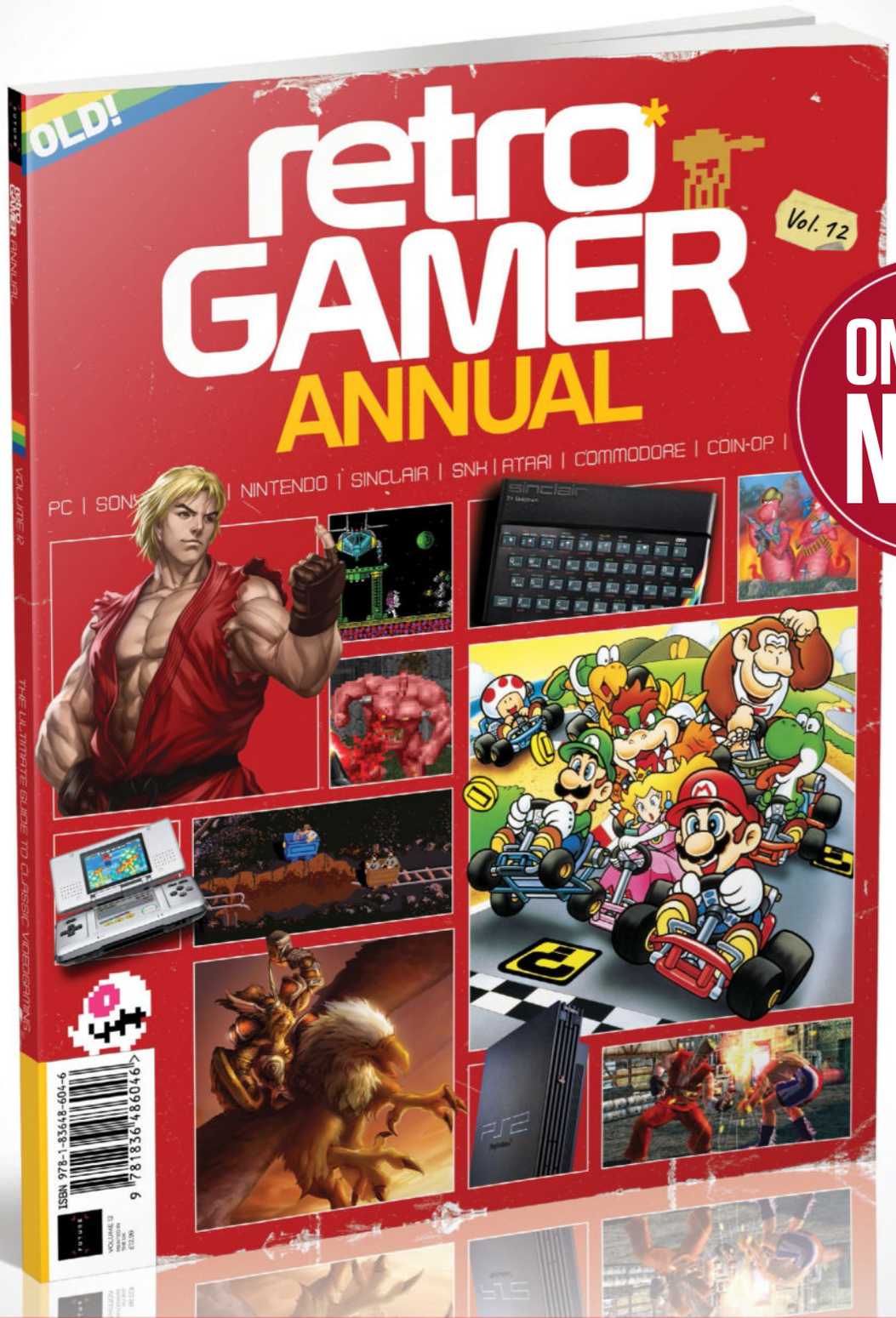
Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!



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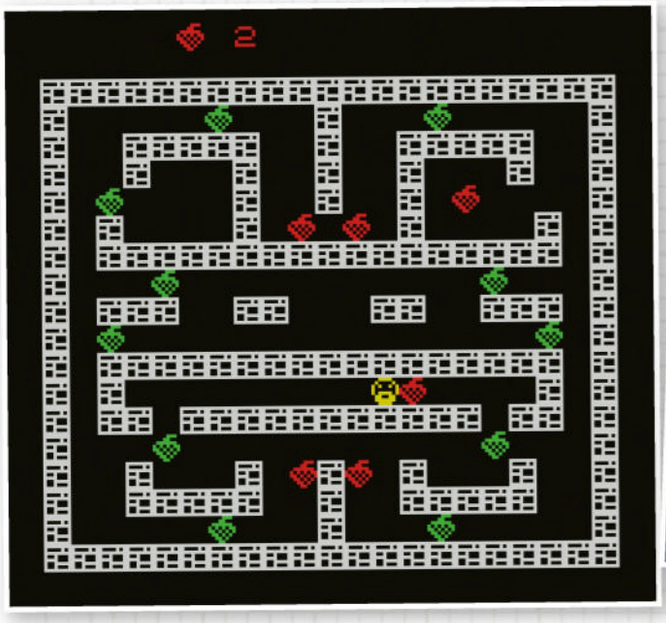
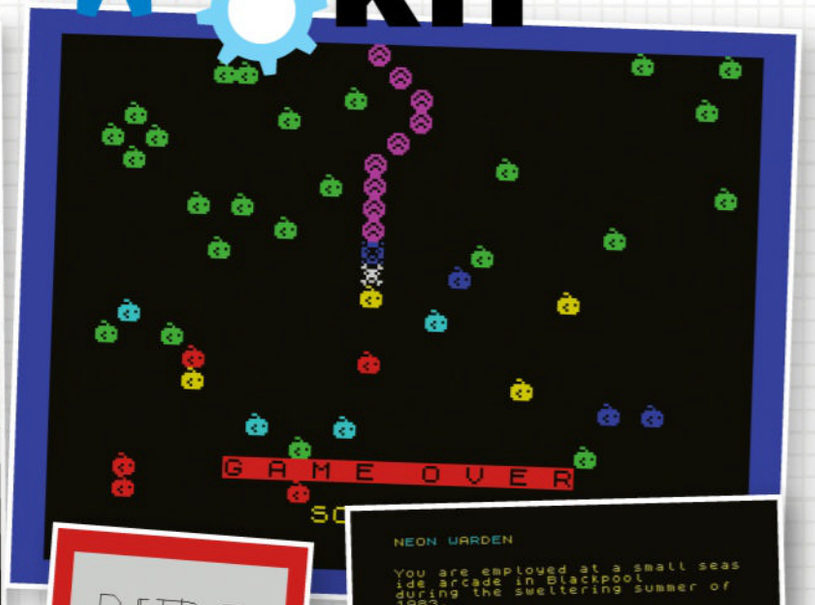
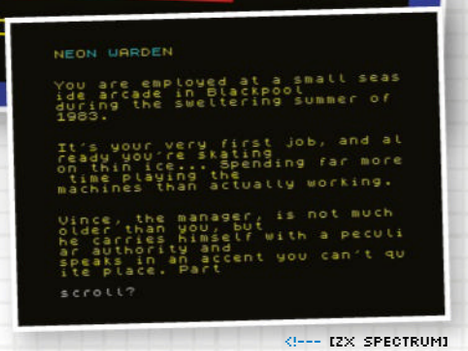
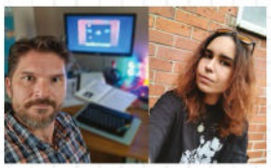
<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>



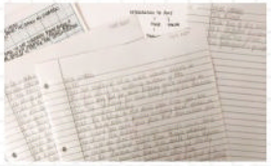



NEON WARDEN
You are employed at a small seas
ide arcade in Blackpool
during the sweltering summer of
1983.
It's your very first job, and al
ready you're skating
on thin ice... Spending far more
time playing the
machines than actually working.
Vince, the manager, is not much
older than you, but
he carries himself with a peculi
ar authority and
speaks in an accent you can't qu
ite place. Part
scroll?

<INTRO> RECENT CHANGES TO THE "DE MINIMIS" RULE FOR PARCELS POSTED TO THE USA HAVE CAUSED PROBLEMS FOR HOMEBREW CREATORS. EUROPEAN PUBLISHERS INITIALLY SUSPENDED ORDERS AND SHIPMENTS UNTIL THE RULES WERE CLEARER AND POSTAL SERVICES SET UP NEW SYSTEMS. BROKE STUDIOS AND THE HOMEBREW FACTORY TOOK A DIFFERENT APPROACH, PARTNERING WITH DAYLEN GAMES TO HANDLE DISTRIBUTION OVER THE ATLANTIC. LET'S HOPE THE NEW AND UPCOMING GAMES FEATURED HERE ARE NOT AFFECTED BY POSTAL PROBLEMS </INTRO>



<!--- ALEX AND GRACE ARE BOTH BASIC BELIEVERS. --->



<!--- GRACE MAKES EXTENSIVE NOTES ON PAPER BEFORE STARTING TO CODE. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

BASIC BEGINNERS

<INTRO> INTERESTED IN WANTING TO PROGRAM IN SINCLAIR BASIC? WE TALK TO TWO PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN LEARNING AND EXPERIMENTING THEMSELVES </INTRO>

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] A LOOK AT NEON WARDEN'S FIRST ACT IN DEVELOPMENT. --->

<BODY> **Alex Cooper's YouTube channel, Animated ALex, demonstrates his BASIC games.** "Back in 1986, I made a game called *Monster Trucks*. The BASIC programming faded away until The Spectrum from Retro Games Ltd was released. I was able to revisit those memories and learn more. My first game, *Speccy*, was said to be the first game released on The Spectrum."

Alex has had to overcome various restrictions, telling us, "Colour clash has caused me some issues. And trying to get everything to work in an organised routine – this has a big impact on the running speed – to keep the main game loop tight and tidy." When it comes to graphics and sounds, Alex tells us the following. "I create graphics using graph paper. I also use an 8-bit character builder online, designed by bigbadmick2000. Sounds I experiment with. For *Slow Manic Willy*, I had help from Damien Redmond. He puts together amazing riffs using the Spectrum's BEEP command." Al's games can be found at animatedal.itch.io/ "I am currently working on a recreation of *Jet Pac* with Miner Willy as the main character, and an isometric game."

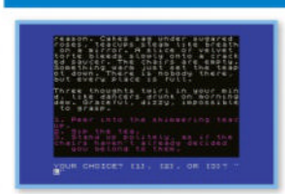
Grace E currently relies on emulation to create her text-based adventure games, available at system6302.itch.io/ "Storytelling has always been a vital part of my life. My stories always ended up branching and converging before coming back together again. First, I find a soundtrack. For my *Bandersnatch* demo, it was *Tangerine Dream* and *The Birthday Party*; for *The Tea Party*, it was Danny Elfman's soundtrack for Tim Burton's *Alice In Wonderland*. For *Neon Warden*, it is the soundtracks from Llamasoft's *TxK* and *Polybius*, with some Autechre."

Grace was originally inspired by watching a film where someone was demonstrating a Spectrum game. "After playing a variety of Speccy titles and reading a bunch of books on the Spectrum Computing website, I found myself up at an ungodly hour, surrounded by notes and diagrams. Once I identified

TRY THESE

BANDERSNATCH (Demo)

<Grace's first game was inspired by the interactive *Black Mirror* episode. Can you survive Pax's wrath by choosing the right options? />



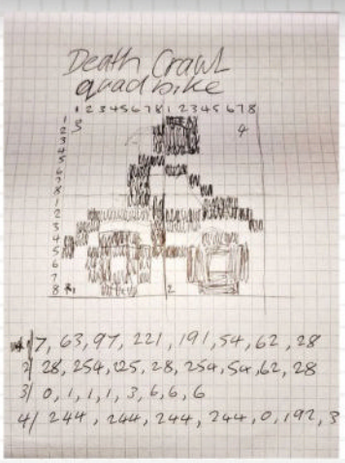
THE TEA PARTY

<Drawing on the classic *Alice In Wonderland*, will you survive the Mad Hatter's tea party? And what's up with the napkins? />

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] AN EARLY PREVIEW OF JET-PAC WILLY. --->



<!--- ALEX'S PAPER DESIGN AND UDG DATA FOR THE ENEMY QUAD BIKE FROM DEATHCRAWL. --->

and corrected the (most ridiculous and embarrassingly obvious!) errors, and got everything working as intended… it felt absolutely brilliant."

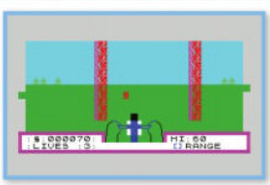
Grace is currently taking a break from coding due to health issues but has completed the first act of her next project. "I am doing my best to incorporate everything I would like to include in a game into *Neon Warden*. It is a coming-of-age story; I want it to feel as though you are sixteen again. It's set in Blackpool during the summer of 1983, involving interdimensional travel via arcade machines!"

Alex and Grace encourage our readers to give BASIC coding a try. Alex says, "It's available as soon as you switch The Spectrum on; there are plenty of books and online resources." Both recommend looking at Spectrum Computing and the Internet Archive. Grace adds, "Just come up with an idea for a game, any idea, and learn how everything works as you progress." </BODY>

<INTRO> FIVE GAMES FROM ALEX AND GRACE YOU SHOULD PLAY </INTRO>

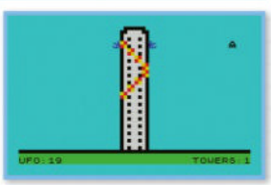
SLOW MANIC WILLY

<Alex is recreating the classic first level of *Manic Miner*. You must jump around the Central Cavern collecting the keys before your air runs out. />



DEATHCRAWL

<This is an ambitious attempt to recreate the classic *Deathchase*. Weave your way between the trees and shoot the enemy bikers. />



UFO

<Move your lasers up and down the tower to defend it from the attacking UFOs, which will set the building on fire! />

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**Atari ST:** Monos51 released *Hero Fantasy: The King's Sword* (ST/STE with 512K). Go adventuring at bit.ly/herofantasy-st />

<**ColecoVision:** CVBasic has been updated to v0.9, with Haroldo's online compiler now supporting NES/Famicom builds. Grab it from bit.ly/cvbasic-online />

<**Dreamcast:** The DreamSDK development environment (incorporating KallistiOS – see **RG**277) has been updated to Revision 4. It's available at dreamsdk.org/ />

<**Game Boy:** The GB Competition 2025 received over 100 entries, including *Sheep Split*, *Polar Peril* and *DMG Vs Super Game Boy* (which cleverly mixes SNES and Game Boy graphics). View them at bit.ly/gbcompo2025 />

<**MSX:** Arcade game *Guzzler*, previously only on the SG-1000, has been ported by Mastropiero. Get guzzling at bit.ly/guzzler-msx />

<**NES:** Retro Bro's scary sequel, *Hobo Albo's Halloween Adventure*, is free, with donations going to the National Coalition For The Homeless in the USA. Download it at bit.ly/albo-nes />

<**Oric:** Raxiss converted the early DOS game *PutUp*, with the full 30-level version now available at bit.ly/putup-oric />

<**PICO-8:** *The Picky Horror Show* from Heracleum recreates the C64 game based on Richard O' Brien's risqué musical/movie, with new characters to control and added difficulty levels. Do the time warp at bit.ly/pickyhorror-pico8 />

<**Plus/4:** TCFS, Unreal and Csabo released their brilliant *Donkey Kong* port. Swing on over to bit.ly/donkeykong-plus4 />

<**Sinclair Next:** Haplo converted his excellent puzzle platformer, *Shift*. You'll find it at bit.ly/shift-haplo />

<**SNES:** The SNES Game Jam attracted great new releases. View them at bit.ly/snesdev2025 />

<**Vic-20:** Aleksi Eeben finished his *Ultima* trilogy by converting *Ultima I* (requires 35K). Go exploring at bit.ly/ultima1-vic20 />

<**ZX Spectrum:** JuanGM released his 128K sequel, *Rebearded Fantasy*. Discover it at bit.ly/rebearded-zx />

CHAMPION CODER

MAS (KTB PRODUCTIONS)

<INTRO> MAS EXPLAINS HOW HE CONVERTS MPAGD GAMES FROM THE SPECTRUM TO THE ENTERPRISE 128 </INTRO>

FROM: WEST MIDLANDS, ENGLAND WEBSITE: KTBPRODUCTIONS.ITCH.IO/ENTERPRISE-GAMES FORMAT: ENTERPRISE 128 / ZX SPECTRUM PREVIOUS GAMES: PAINTER MAN, THROBBIN' HEADACHE DX, THROBBING HEARTACHE, WELCOME TO CHUMP TOWN WORKING ON: DIATANX (ENTERPRISE)

<!--- MAS' SPECTRUM VERSIONS OF HIS GAMES ARE ALSO AVAILABLE FROM KTBPRODUCTIONS.ITCH.IO/ --->

WHEN DID YOU START USING MPAGD, MAS?

<Late in 2023. My learning process saw me create Dollar Bill, a duck who is obsessed with money, the hero of my first game, *Shovel Duck*. I was following the great tutorials put together by Minilopetro (minilopetro.com), and I haven't stopped yet! />

WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN THE ENTERPRISE 128?

<There is a thriving MPAGD community out there. The author of the Spectrum game, *Frankee Goes Home*, had problems targeting the Enterprise. I was able to replicate the problem. Noel Persa, responsible for the Enterprise version of the MPAGD engine, helped me out. When Noel put together the Enterprise version, a decision was made to effectively emulate the Spectrum screen. The Enterprise version can also be told to use ULA+ palettes. />

IS THAT COMPLICATED?

<It is a fairly simple process; you create your code targeting the ZX Spectrum or MSX, export your game as a 'gamename.agd' file, then use the Enterprise tools to port your game across. By targeting the 128K, the extra RAM means no contention of shared memory.

The complication comes when you want to add music or transfer bespoke routines. I documented these methods so they could be used by others to add to the unfortunately small selection of games available for the system. Every game I can bring to the Enterprise, I will. />

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

<I'm porting my most recent Spectrum game, *DiaTanX* - more of an action puzzler than a combat game. After that, I have a scrolling platformer with the working title of *Hairy Legs*, and an unnamed project likely to have a head-related pun, like *Get Ahead* or similar. I also must complete a game I started what feels like forever ago, *John Can't Jump*.

I've also been writing a few things for the Spectrum using Boriel Basic, aiming for a different sort of game than MPAGD allows. />

<!--- [ENTERPRISE 128] LEVEL 5 OF DIATANX WAS DESIGNED AS A TRIBUTE TO PAC-MAN WITH ITS TUBULAR WALLS. --->

<!--- [ENTERPRISE 128] PAINTER MAN MUST COLOUR THE WALLS OF HIS CASTLE ON A BANK HOLIDAY, WHILE AVOIDING ESCAPED LIONS! --->

DATA BURST

YANDEX RGB COMPETITION 2025

<INFO FORMAT: ZX SPECTRUM CREDITS: COMPETITION RUN BY THE YANDEX RGB MUSEUM PRICE: FREE WEB: YRGB.ORG />

<BODY> **This year's competition offered cash prizes, attracting 15 great entries judged by the fans and a panel of Spectrum celebrities.** Honourable mentions go to *Cindy Block* (where you shoot blocks to clear the falling shapes, based on Konami's *Quarth*/*Block Hole*) and *Kubanoid* (Stardust's colourful puzzle game), who shared 3rd place in the Sound category. We also enjoyed *Frostland*, a strategy game where you must survive in an icy land (inspired by the *Frostpunk* games).

3D racing game *Travel Unlimited* (developed by Manu & Kit) got 3rd in both Gameplay and Graphics, and features options to upgrade your car. Runner-up was the tough but good-looking run-and-gun platformer *Asymmetry*, also by Manu & Kit, taking the Graphics prize.

The overall winner, with 1st in Gameplay and 1st in the Audience vote, was *Cubic* by Gogin (Sergei Smirnov). The plot sees Hexatron, the Lord Of Chaos, destroying the Sacred Talisman and a plucky young Cubic called Bix trying to retrieve the six pieces hidden at the top of the six Great Towers. At first, you are just climbing vertically up the platforms. Picking up the 3D cube means you can rotate the platforms in the style of *Fez* and *Nebulus*. With new mechanics gradually added, a great soundtrack, and those amazing graphics, it was a worthy winner. </BODY>

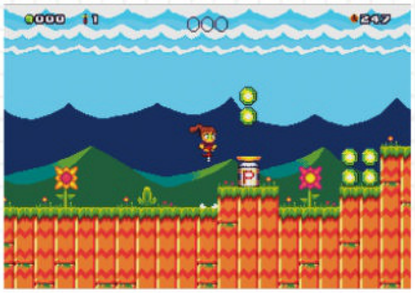
SCORE: NA

<!--- [ZX SPECTRUM] 3RD – A SPIN-OFF FROM THE TRAVEL THROUGH TIME SERIES, COLLIDING WITH OBJECTS REFILLS YOUR TURBO METER.. --->

NEW GAMES NEEDED

Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT



<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] IN THE SPRING SUNSHINE, SPINNING WITH A OPENS THE JAR, WHILE C IS HELD TO JUMP HIGHER.. --->

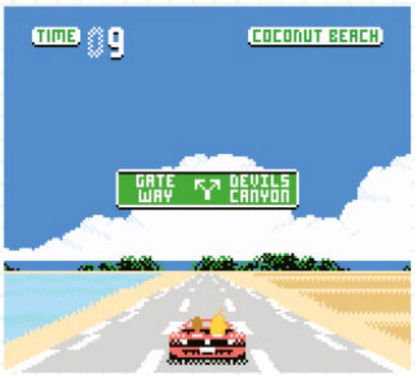
<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] WINTER SEES ENEMIES FROZEN IN ICE, BUT THEY CAN BE RELEASED BY DIVING ONTO THEM WITH B. --->

GO! GO! POGOGIRL

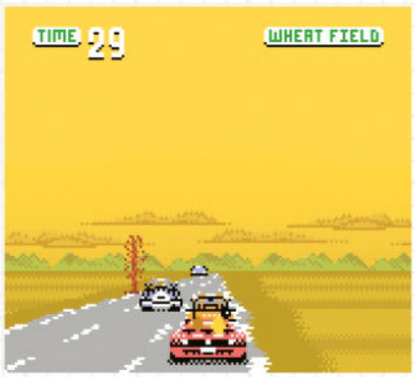
<INFO FORMAT: MEGA DRIVE CREDITS: SPACE PANTS GAMES PRICE: $10 DIGITAL DOWNLOAD / £16 CART ONLY / £38 BOXED WEB: BIT.LY/POGOGIRL-MD, BIT.LY/POGOGIRL-PHYSICAL />

<BODY> **Andrej Ohsat's PC original has reached modern consoles, and Space Pants created this fun Mega Drive adaptation.** Our heroine bounces around the level on her pogo stick, picking up green gems (there are 100 per level, but many are hidden) and three red gems to take to the portal. Enemies kill on contact, but can be bounced on, doors are opened with switches, while jars and P icons can be spun open to reveal more gems. There are four seasons with five levels each, plus a set of five bonus levels to master. The unusual control method, cute graphics, and bouncy soundtrack draw you in, but even with new features added in the tougher later levels, it might not last a seasoned player forever. </BODY>

SCORE: 75%



<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] APPROACHING THE FIRST JUNCTION, WHICH WAY SHOULD YOU CHOOSE? --->



<!--- [GAME BOY COLOR] CRUISING THROUGH THE WHEATFIELDS WITH TRAFFIC GETTING HEAVIER. --->

OUTRUN GB

<INFO FORMAT: GAME BOY COLOR CREDITS: ROCKETSHIP PARK (SHANE MCCAFFERTY – CODE & GRAPHICS, SLOOPYGOOP – MUSIC) PRICE: FREE WEB: BIT.LY/OUTRUNGB />

<BODY> **3D racers *Nitro* and *Hero GP* were practice runs for Shane's well-made take on the Sega classic.** Sloopygoop's soundtrack is brilliant, and the excellent graphics represent the different courses nicely. There are minor issues – side graphics are relatively small, and sprite flicker sometimes occurs in heavy traffic. Another occurs when you reach a junction: the game pauses, the sign appears, and a new area is chosen by pushing left or right. Despite these niggles the game is great fun, and the later stages become very challenging. This is a bite-sized, nostalgic treat. </BODY>

SCORE: 85%

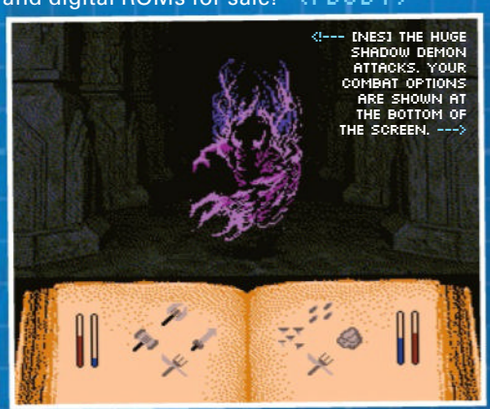
PROCESSING

<INTRO> GRAYSON WENDELL OF SLEEPY BITS GAMES TALKS ABOUT THEIR GRAPHICALLY IMPRESSIVE NES DUNGEON CRAWLER </INTRO>

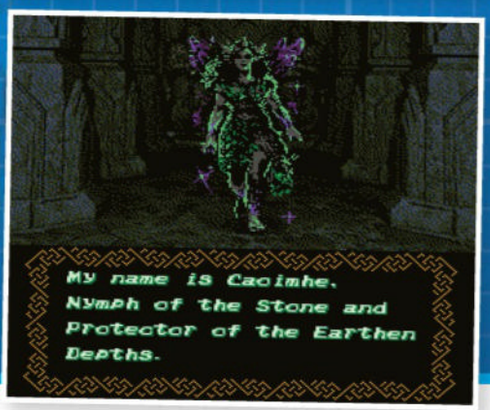
<BODY> ***The Halls Of Talamh Domhain* looks incredible, with multiple influences, as Grayson tells us.** "The *Wizardry* series, *Swords And Serpents*, *Silent Debuggers*, and *Shin Megami Tensei* – all inspired exploration, combat, and vendors," we're told. "The *Diablo* series inspired looting and crafting. Additionally, the design work of Alan Lee, Wētā, Four Horsemen Studios, and *D&D* have all been great visual references." Grayson is really pleased with how everything is progressing, telling us, "Thanks to creative use of the MMC3 mapper, we're carefully programming everything in 6502 assembly to get the absolute most out of the hardware. The monsters and NPCs are the work of a very talented artist."

The user interface is well designed and important, too. "One guiding principle is to minimise the use of text and menu windows, such as the combat menu appearing inside a tome carried by one of the protagonists. Selecting combat actions with the d-pad was a natural extension."

So when can we expect the game? "We are targeting an early 2026 release. There's still a ton of music to chart and testing/tuning to be done. We will definitely have physical carts and digital ROMs for sale!" </BODY>



<!--- [NES] THE HUGE SHADOW DEMON ATTACKS. YOUR COMBAT OPTIONS ARE SHOWN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SCREEN. --->



HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

FREE-RANGE PLATFORMING

Looking back at Nineties 3D platformers

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

***Banjo-Kazooie* is on the cover this issue.** As a result, we've decided that it was high time that we collectively reminisce about the three-dimensional revolution of the late-Nineties, when the emergence of powerful new hardware allowed developers to redefine what a platform game could and should be.

NICK

So, 3D platformers then – is it safe to assume that *Super Mario 64* was everyone's starting point on those?

TIM

Nope, never played it, not once. So my first was *Crash Bandicoot* from a demo disc. And that disc may have had the demo for *Jumping Flash! 2*, which was more fun than *Crash* I reckon.

NICK

Yes! In this magazine, we love and respect the amazing *Jumping Flash!* series.

DARRAN

It's not exactly 3D but *Bug* is definitely the first game I played. What a game-changer *Super Mario 64* was though. You have to feel almost sorry for virtually everything else that came after it.

NICK

See, I'm pretty sure that *Mario* was the first one I saw, but *Tomb Raider* was the first one I actually played. It just gets left out of the conversation somewhat, because Lara Croft isn't a cuddly animal mascot. But yeah, I remember playing games like *Croc* and *Gex 3D* on the PlayStation and pretending they came close to *Mario*.

DARRAN

Tomb Raider is interesting because it's arguably an adventure game first and foremost but there's a lot of platforming in it. Tremendous sense of scale too.

TIM

There is a lot of platforming in it. And getting stuck, lost and frustrated because it's quite difficult to know where to go. So difficult (for me) that I had to wait to buy an issue of *PowerStation* for the next part of its guide.

DARRAN

Outside of *Tomb Raider* and *Super Mario 64*, the biggest issue I had with many of the games that followed is they felt so empty and sparse. *Bubsy 3D* and *Earthworm Jim 3D* are good examples of this.

NICK

Bubsy 3D is definitely something that rhymes with sparse.

TIM

My problem with them was because they all had some sort of cute mascot-type character, they all felt like kids' games at the time. And not something I really wanted to play.

DARRAN

Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos, I'm looking at you. Am I right in also thinking that a lot of those early games didn't have proper analogue controls as well like *Super Mario 64*, which further added to their clunkiness? (I think even *Tomb Raider* was digital still.)

NICK

Yeah, that's right – mainly on PlayStation, where digital controls were standard for a long time. As for the cute mascot aspect of things, I'm pretty sure that's why *Sonic Adventure* has that hard rock theme song, to reassure you that it's OK for adults to enjoy it.

DARRAN

Outside of *Super Mario 64*, did anyone have a favourite example of the genre from this era? I genuinely prefer *Banjo-Kazooie* to *Super Mario 64* for example. I love the structure of it, the level design and the fact there's so much to do in it.

NICK

I loved *Crash Bandicoot 2* and *3*, but I don't really think of them as fully 3D, and I really like the ambition of *Sonic Adventure* with all the varied play styles.

» [Dreamcast] *Sonic Adventure* had the ability to do wide open stages, but linearity made more sense.

» [PlayStation] Sony's console didn't really get close to *Super Mario 64* until *Spyro* came along.

» [GameCube] Sorry *Vexx*, but the decline of the genre is all your fault. Actually, we're not sorry – *Vexx* should be.

But as I said earlier *Jumping Flash!* is a favourite of mine, in large part because it came along before Nintendo codified the rules of 3D platforming, and it approaches the concept totally differently as a result.

TIM

Aside from the first three *Tomb Raiders*, *Ape Escape* was really the only one I played, and that was mostly to test out the new analogue controller.

DARRAN

Despite being absolutely massive during the Nineties, the 3D platformer is nowhere near as popular as it once was. Why do we think that is?

TIM

Because of *Vexx*. *Vexx* ruined everything. I hate that game, bloody *Vexx*. Oh, and *Malice* and *Scaler*. They were rubbish too, not Nineties games sure, but definitely death knells.

NICK

And *Ty The Tasmanian Tiger*. Who could forget that guy? But seriously, I think there was a lot of fatigue towards platform mascots in general, and even the characters that still had appeal struggled to get things right – not to point fingers at any particular blue hedgehogs.

DARRAN

They are slowly gaining a bit of traction now I feel. *Kao The Kangaroo* and *Croc* were remastered, there's an updated version of *Yooka-Laylee* coming out and I've been playing *Bakeru*

» [Nintendo 64] Nintendo threw out the level design rules and started again with *Super Mario 64*. That's bold.

> "I like the ambition of Sonic Adventure with all the varied play styles"
> **NICK THORPE**

which is essentially a spiritual successor to *The Mystical Ninja* games. Oh and we've got the *Super Mario Galaxy* games out now as well.

NICK

The revival makes sense, I think. The kids who were raised on *Mario 64* and *Spyro* all grew up and went into game development.

TIM

Can't wait for *Vexx 2* then…

DARRAN

You'll hopefully be waiting a bloody long time. ✱

» [Nintendo 64] Does Rare's *Banjo-Kazooie* top *Super Mario 64* for you? Letters to the usual address, please.

» [PlayStation] *Jumping Flash!* stands apart from later 3D platformers thanks to its first-person perspective and major verticality.

» [PlayStation 4] Games like *A Hat In Time* have been keeping 3D platformer fans happy in recent years.

READERS REACT

What's your favourite Nineties 3D platformer?

ghostdoggtv.bsky.social
If *Ape Escape* isn't on the best Nineties platformers list, then the list is wrong. The graphics are a little dated now but the controls, music and gameplay are LOL LMAO good. This game gave you all kinds of tools and toys to swing around instead of just swinging Bowser in a circle and chucking him three times. [Harsh – Ed]

Gaëtan Duchateau
I have fond memories of *Rayman 2*. I remember spending a lot of time collecting all the Lums. I lent the game to a neighbour, and when I got it back, my save had been deleted. I was devastated. I later found out that the game resets the saves when it's inserted into another N64.

Michael McKean
Crash Bandicoot – pure linear platforming, unlike *Super Mario 64*/*Spyro*. 2D gameplay transferred to a 3D world, you could say. Special shout out though to *Gex: Deep Cover Gecko*. There's not a lot that beats spinning presents back across a ravine at an evil Santa Claus.

Anonymous X
This is too obvious a choice, but… *Super Mario 64*. It was a genuinely revolutionary game in a way which gets overlooked decades later. It left a remarkably well-formed early template which games from countless genres and formats have built and expanded upon. One of the three most influential games ever.

Michael Loukoumis
Sonic Adventure. Running away from the whale felt like a true next-gen moment, and it was one of the first open-world games I remember loving.

Thomas Marshall
Coming from *Super Mario Bros 3* and *Super Mario World*, *Mario 64* never really felt like a *Mario* game to me, something has always felt a little off, like it's an extended tech demo. *Rocket: Robot On Wheels* on the other hand was the perfect transition of 2D mechanics into 3D, a totally underrated gem.

FatPlumber
As good as *Super Mario 64* is, peak Nineties platforming is *Banjo-Kazooie*. Stunning to look at, packed with humour and just incredible to play whether that was 30-odd years ago or today. Sorry *Mario*, *Banjo-Kazooie* has your Nineties crown.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS PS4 CHINESE CONTROLLER

"They released a PS4 System bundle in China with the *Shadow Of The Colossus* PS4 remake, which included this (sort of ugly) controller."

AMOUNT PAID: $200

ICO QUEEN'S SWORD

"I commissioned Heroic Replicas to make this steel Queen's Sword from *Ico* back in 2023. It has the exact runes on the blade, the chain links on the pommel, cloth wraps on the grip, and the very stylised gear-like guard."

AMOUNT PAID: $3,000

UK ICO STORE DISPLAY

"I bought this in 2002 off eBay. It's stunning, and the only one I've ever seen."

AMOUNT PAID: $150

BIO

NAME:
Shawn Reed

LOCATION:
Mount Vernon, Ohio, USA

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
$30,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
PlayStation 2

FAVOURITE GAME:
Ico

BLUESKY:
@icothegame

THE COLOSSUS HUNTER

Shawn Reed on his quest to track down Team Ico memorabilia

Words by Darran Jones

While our latest curator is a collector of games, Shawn Reed also has a specific focus on one series in particular: the games of Team Ico. As you can imagine, his quest began with the release of *Ico*. "I started collecting Team Ico memorabilia right from the jump in late 2001," Shawn tells us. "I had read reviews of the game in magazines like *Game Informer* and *EGM* which is what initially put the game on my radar. And the positive reviews were spot-on. It's awesome."

Obviously in terms of games themselves, there are only a handful of titles, so what is it about their design that makes them so compelling? "With Fumito Ueda's games, it's really the whole package," Shawn says, "beautiful music, atmospheric and strange locales, and the creative use of game mechanics like the hand-holding in *Ico*, gripping and climbing in *Shadow*, and communicating with Trico in *The Last Guardian*. Each one is different but they all make for unique and exciting games."

Typically when collectors go after a small number of games they tend to look out for different regional variations and it turns out that Shawn is no different. "It's part of what makes collecting these games so fun," he admits. "For each game, the US, PAL and Japanese versions are all very different, and often one region will have limited editions or extra features none of the others do. And the UK and Japan had the good sense to avoid the US 3D *Ico* cover art, so they're already superior in that regard."

One of the things that instantly identify Team Ico games is their distinctive looks, character designs and environments and those game aspects are often considered when the games are being marketed, which puts any memorabilia on Shawn's radar. "They really tried to stick to the themes of the game with their marketing in cool ways," he explains. "There is a promotional metal cage with a candle in it, resembling the cage Yorda is in at the start of *Ico*. They have a postcard of Yorda in bubble wrap to signify how she needs to be protected. There are Japanese point of purchase flyers where you open them by separating Ico and Yorda from holding hands."

As you can imagine, when there's a small number of games, a need for regional variants and interesting memorabilia, strolling the shops of Shawn's home town of Mount Vernon isn't always going to yield the best results, so his Team Ico search often goes online. "It's mostly Yahoo Japan and eBay, but I have connected with other videogame collectors on forums to obtain some of the rarer things," he says. "A few people I received promotional materials from obtained those items from people who worked on the games as well."

Even though Shawn's home is filled with all manner of exotic and stunning-looking pieces, there are still plenty of items he'd love to acquire. "In 2021 *Famitsu* released some *Ico* 20th anniversary merchandise (posters, mugs, pens) by lottery. I'd love that. Also at the 2017 PlayStation Experience show in Anaheim, California there was a 15-foot-tall Gaius Colossus head you could climb on and pretend to stab for a photo. I wouldn't mind having that giant Colossus head!" Here's hoping Shawn has room for it if he does manage to track it down.

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

THE LAST GUARDIAN PRESS KIT

"The press kit itself is awesome, with the game logo laser-etched onto a feather and a pop-up diorama. This one is #0002 of 2456. I hope Fumito Ueda has 0001."

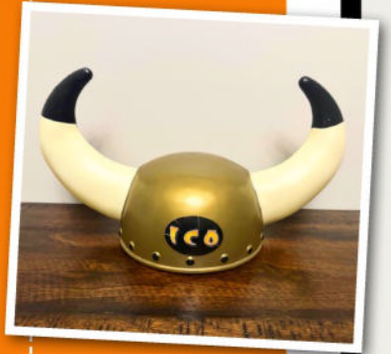
AMOUNT PAID: $400

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

PROMOTIONAL ICO HORNED HELMET

■ "One of the first items I bought. Just classic *Ico*. This piece is the centrepiece of my collection."

PAID: $250



BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

BANJO-KAZOOIE (NINTENDO 64)

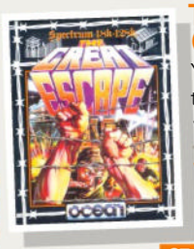
If you want to enjoy Banjo and Kazooie's original adventure you'll be shelling out **£40** for a boxed PAL copy. US versions are far pricier, typically hitting **£80.**

MAGICLAND DIZZY (AMSTRAD CPC)

You don't need magic mastery to conjure up this game, as copies are plentiful and rarely top **£5.** You'll need more powerful magic to find the *Dizzy Collection* for under **£50** though.

OPERATION WOLF (MASTER SYSTEM)

Grab a Light Phaser and track down this excellent conversion while it's still cheap. You shouldn't have to pay more than **£15** for a complete copy.



THE GREAT ESCAPE (ZX SPECTRUM)

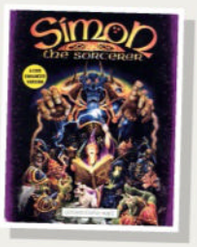
You won't have to dig deep into your wallet for this Ocean gem, both big box and Hit Squad variants rarely pass **£10.**

WING COMMANDER (PC)

There are numerous variants for Chris Roberts' space classic with the *Deluxe Edition* going for **£50.** If you don't mind lots of disks the standard version rarely passes **£30.**

LUMINES: PUZZLE FUSION (PSP)

The popularity of this toe-tapping puzzler means you'll find complete copies for under a fiver. We even found sealed copies for **£11!**



SIMON THE SORCERER (AMIGA)

Acquiring a complete copy of Simon's first adventure won't be cheap, or easy. Mint condition copies can reach **£120.** Our advice is to grab the CD32 version if you can, as it rarely tops **£55.**

BURNOUT DOMINATOR (PS2)

Do you have a friend who dislikes the song *Girlfriend* as much as Nick does? For just **£5** you can pull off the same prank that caught Nick out. Bargain.

HOW MUCH?!

FATAL FURY SPECIAL (MEGA-CD)

If you needed further proof that this SNK conversion was extremely collectible, an Australian PAL copy with a cracked case still managed to sell for a whopping **£1,156.**

Prices correct at time of print

» [Saturn] Tillis carries an injured victim along a precariously narrow walkway, with a fire raging ahead.

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **» DEVELOPER:** SONIC TEAM
- **» PLATFORM:** SATURN
- **» RELEASE:** 1998
- **» PRICE TODAY:** £140+

BURNING RANGERS

Sonic Team designed one of the last major Saturn games to show off what the outgoing hardware could really do, and it has you rescuing civilians and putting out fires. But should you pick it up if there's money burning a hole in your pocket?

Words by Nick Thorpe

THE GAME

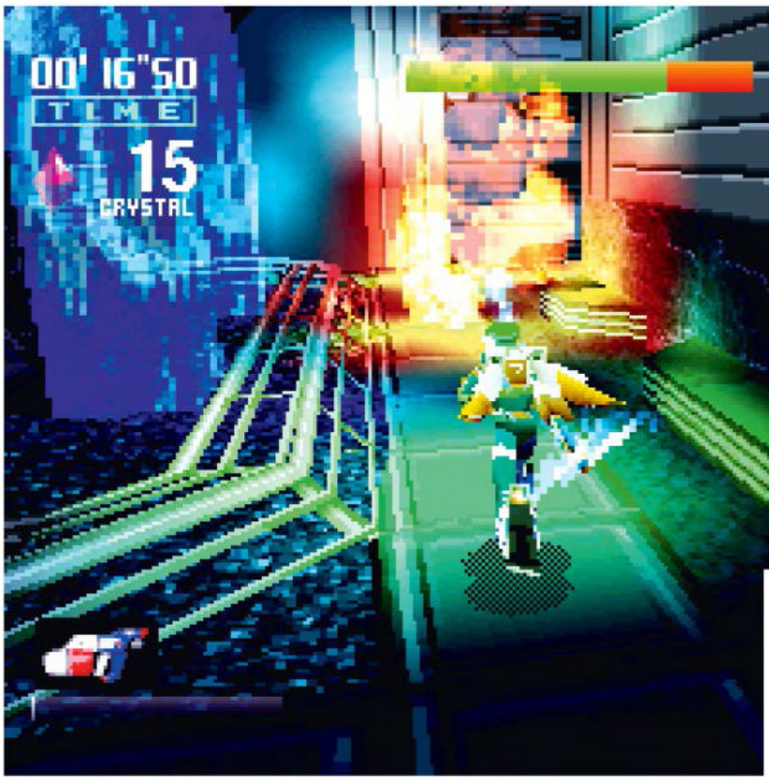
The Burning Rangers are a team of futuristic spacefaring rescue operatives, and you're the new recruit. Taking control of Shou Amabane or Tillis, you've got to fight fires and rescue stranded victims in settings such as a power plant and a space station, moving quickly to prevent the disasters from escalating. No matter which character you pick, you'll have a jetpack to help you dodge unexpected explosions and reach high places, giving a platforming dimension to gameplay.

Though the game does have boss battles and occasionally other enemies, fire is the key hazard you'll face. You can charge up your extinguishing laser for powerful shots, but it's better to use basic shots if you can, as putting out fires this way generates crystals. As with Sonic's rings, one is enough to protect you from fatal damage, but you'll need five to transport a victim to safety. With ten, you'll earn an extra continue. Each of the game's four stages has a huge number of layout configurations, delivering fresh routes during each replay.

Sonic Team sought to stretch the Saturn's limits with *Burning Rangers*, and the game incorporates graphical features like a lighting system and transparency effects thought to be impossible on the console. The game also includes plenty of voice acting, with your colleagues checking in via radio to update you on the situation and help you to navigate each area – vital, since you don't have a map.

THE QUALITY

Critics felt that *Burning Rangers* was a very good game, with a couple of notable weaknesses. *Sega Saturn Magazine* felt that it was "innovative and unique," praising the "versatile controls" and "revolutionary" voice navigation in a 90% review. *GamesMaster*'s 81% review noted the "atmospheric lighting" and "excellent attention to detail" in the graphics, but felt that Sonic Team's "over-ambitious" level design led to a "less than glorious glitch-o-vision" presentation – a complaint all reviewers shared. *Edge* felt that it was "yet another example of Sonic Team's creative clout in creating



» [Saturn] The fire in the distance shows off the lighting system Sonic Team created for *Burning Rangers*.

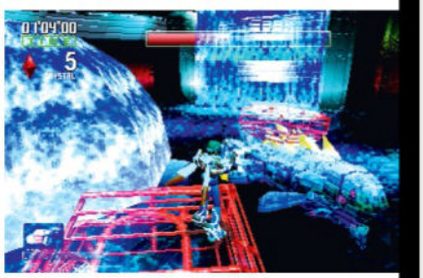
offbeat, engaging titles" awarding it 8/10, but cautioned readers that it was "fairly easy to complete". Writing for *CVG*, Ed Lomas agreed that it initially "all seemed very small", but went on to say, "Once I finished it and realised how little of the game I'd actually seen, I really got into it." That replay value helped the game to a 4/5 score, rounding out the positive reviews.

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

Burning Rangers might have been one big rescue mission, but the Saturn itself was beyond saving when the game reached North America and Europe in the summer of 1998. It was one of the final few games to reach both regions, and low quantities were produced as a result. Although Japanese copies of the game are far more common, *Burning Rangers* didn't sell particularly well there either – it was only the fourth best-selling Saturn game in its debut week, and dropped out of *Famitsu*'s all-formats top 30 chart after just two weeks. A big Saturn release could sell in decent numbers in Japan at that point, so this would have been a disappointment. Interest in the game has stayed relatively high due to its reputation and the popularity of Sonic Team's games, but it has never been officially ported to another system, sustaining demand for the original.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

The easiest way to save money on *Burning Rangers* is to buy a Japanese copy, which can be had for under £50, but you'll need a good grasp on Japanese to understand the directions given over the radio. The audio CD is a nice bonus, though. If you want something else, you'll struggle because few games are truly similar to *Burning Rangers*. Fire-fighting games such as *Rosco McQueen* (PlayStation, £25+) and *Fire Heroes* (PlayStation 2, £35+) don't have the platforming aspect of Sonic Team's game, and frankly aren't as good. *Nuclear Blaze* (£10+), an indie game on modern formats, does have the platforming and is well crafted, but feels very different because it's strictly in 2D. If you want a game with similarly vast 3D platforming environments on the Saturn, *Tomb Raider* (£5+) has them.



» [Saturn] The second stage boss is clearly designed to show off the game's "impossible" transparency effects.

» [Saturn] As well as randomised level layouts, there are secret characters to add some replay value.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The kind of money *Burning Rangers* commands might lead you to expect a flawless game, and it certainly isn't perfect. However, it's a true Saturn exclusive that pushes the hardware close to its breaking point, and a game that still feels fresh and inventive decades after its release. Ideally, Sega would port or remake it, but it's a fun game that's offers something unique if you can justify the spend – just be sure to keep your expectations in check.

I'VE GOT IT!

These readers have hot property

Pete Murphy
I picked up my PAL copy around launch, so summer 1998, must have been around £40. Most places were keen to get rid of Saturn games by this time, so there were a few opportunities to get a decent deal.

Josh Fairhurst
I bought the US release of *Burning Rangers* for $180 back in 2008 with my first game industry paycheque.

Mark Hughes
I had a Japanese copy for a few years beforehand, but I got the PAL version from eBay in 2020. It cost £120, but I wanted to celebrate finishing a big deadline!

Midlife Crysis
I wanted this back in the day but had jumped ship to PlayStation prior to release. I finally own it now though! I got mine from CEX which was cheaper than the likes of eBay in August. I paid £150 for it and it's a PAL copy.

DJ Tatsujin
I bought my US copy at an indie shop where I went to college in 2001. My rural retailers never carried Saturn, so I had never seen so many Saturn games in one place. *BR* had the highest price at $50, so I had to give the purchase a lot of thought. Most 'retro games' at that time were $20 or less.

Dan 'The Mega' Driver
This is my PAL copy I've had since launch, which I got from Game for about £40. An absolute favourite of mine, a joy to play, especially with the delightful fan mail you get as you rescue civilians from the 3,000+ stage combinations. Despite lacking polish, it's a classic IMO.

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

FEELING THE FORCE

Darran looks back at his longtime affection for Star Wars

I was just three years old when *Star Wars* debuted so I never got to witness it on the big screen as a kid. By the time *Return Of The Jedi* made its debut in 1983 I was an obsessive *Star Wars* fan and remember seeing it at the local Odeon with my dad and sister. The queue seemed to go on forever and the atmosphere was electric.

When my tenth birthday rolled around that year, everything I had was *Star Wars*-related, from a jigsaw featuring Luke Skywalker pulling a gun on Jabba The Hutt to a smattering of figures and smaller vehicles. I even had the novel which featured a chapter with Luke making his lightsaber which wasn't in the original movie.

Despite the massive impact *Return Of The Jedi* had on me as a child, it's *The Empire Strikes Back* that's my favourite *Star Wars* film and it was an amazing experience to see the *Special Edition* version on the big screen in the late-Nineties. It's a shame then that so many of the best *Star Wars* videogames don't focus on that epic movie. Granted, the very first *Star Wars* game was based on the film (and bloody good it is too) and many games have featured the epic Battle Of Hoth, but good games purely based on *The Empire Strikes Back* are few and far between. It makes sense given the lack of action in the film, but it's still disappointing.

Outside of *Empire* there have been plenty of games based on the mainline movies and they've all had varying degrees of success. Highlights for me personally include the original *Star Wars* arcade game with its stunning vector graphics, the later *Star Wars Trilogy Arcade*, the aforementioned *The Empire Strikes Back* on the Atari 2600, *Episode 1: Racer*, the excellent *X-Wing* and *Rogue Leader* games and *Super Star Wars*. That first SNES *Star Wars* game is particularly memorable as it was Christmas Eve and my mum grabbed a copy for me from my local importer so I could play it over Christmas. It cost me £70 (more than a week's wages for me in 1992) and I completed it by Boxing Day, but I simply didn't care, it was so much fun.

> "That year, everything I had was Star Wars-related"
> **DARRAN JONES**

Another pivotal *Star Wars* gaming moment for me was the release of *Battlefront*. I wrote an early preview for *games™* and the team at Pandemic was apparently so proud that the preview was hung in their office. The game itself was tremendous fun and we'd often play it after work on Xbox Live until the early hours. In fact, the Xbox era onwards was a pretty good time for *Star Wars* as systems were evolving and building on what the PC had first established with the likes of *Dark Forces*, *X-Wing* and *Jedi Knight*.

I still dabble in *Star Wars* games now and I really enjoyed playing *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* recently and EA's take on *Battlefront II*. I've also been playing *Revenge Of The Sith* on my Steam Deck and that's a surprisingly decent game for its time as well. *The Force Unleashed* has also been getting a fair amount of Steam Deck love, even if it's rather janky in places.

More recently, I've become obsessed with *Star Wars Unlimited* (a new trading card game) and collecting Hasbro's range of Black Series 6-inch figures in addition to my Hot Toys figures. I was initially planning to stick to the original trilogy, but I've moved on to various other shows and been grabbing numerous figures from the Gaming Greats sub-line, which features everyone from *Fallen Order*'s Cal Kestis to *KOTOR*'s Bastilla Shan. It has become such an obsession that I've boxed up a large amount of my retro games (SNES, PSP, Xbox and DS) so that I can make space for them. And finally, I've decided to watch every mainline *Star Wars* film/TV show in chronological order and I've just hit season two of *The Clone Wars*.

I'm not sure if I'll ever outgrow my love for *Star Wars*, and in all honesty I hope I don't. Both the films and games have had a big impact on me over the years and I'd like to think that reaching old age won't diminish that.

ESSENTIAL ADVENTURES

STAR WARS GAMES I STILL LIKE TO PLAY

STAR WARS EPISODE I: RACER
I sunk hours into the N64 version and it's now easily available on most modern systems.

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
A genuinely brilliant RPG with plenty of memorable characters and interesting locations to explore.

STAR WARS
Yes the arcade game is getting on now, but it's still a superb blaster. I'd love to have space for the Arcade1Up version.

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO
This is a solid squad-based shooter set during the prequel films. It's another *Star Wars* game with a modern remaster.

STAR WARS JEDI: FALLEN ORDER
I enjoyed this when I played it and Cal Kestis has become one of my favourite *Star Wars* characters.

I FOUND THIS IN A CHARITY SHOP RECENTLY. I LAST OWNED A COPY WHEN I WAS TEN.
STAR WARS
RETURN OF THE JEDI
Annual
[PC] REPUBLIC COMMANDO IS ONE OF SEVERAL XBOX-ERA STAR WARS GAMES THAT HAS BEEN UPDATED FOR MODERN SYSTEMS.
[PC] FALLEN ORDER IS A GREAT GAME, COMBINING ELEMENTS OF DARK SOULS AND UNCHARTED TO GREAT EFFECT.

COLLECTING BLACK SERIES FIGURES IS MY NEW CURRENT OBSESSION. I HAVE AROUND 80 SINCE STARTING MY COLLECTION IN MAY.
[GAMECUBE] THE BATTLE OF HOTH IS ONE OF THE MOST-VISITED SCENES FROM ANY STAR WARS FILM. IT MAKES SENSE, AS IT'S AMAZING.
[XBOX] KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC IS A SUPERB RPG, ALTHOUGH I'VE STILL NOT COMPLETED THE SEQUEL YET!
[PC] THERE WERE SOME BRILLIANT PC STAR WARS GAMES DURING THE NINETIES. TIE-FIGHTER IS ONE OF THEM.
[ARCADE] WHENEVER I VISIT ARCADE CLUB, STAR WARS IS ONE OF THE FIRST GAMES I PLAY.
Y-wing Red 2 has been destroyed.
[PC] I'VE BEEN PLAYING THE FORCE UNLEASHED ON MY STEAM DECK. IT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE NOW IT HAS A LOCKED FRAMERATE.

STAR WARS MEMORIES

Readers share their favourite Star Wars games

Retro Game Den
Knights Of The Old Republic is the pinnacle of *Star Wars* games for me. A galaxy-spanning adventure that expands on the wider lore of the *Star Wars* universe. It is one of the best *Star Wars* stories ever told. Though, *Rogue Squadron 2* is begging for an HD remaster.

Mac84
Star Wars: Shadows Of The Empire for me.

David
As a *Star Wars* ignorer, as far as I'm concerned there's only one objectively good *Star Wars* game and it's *Episode 1: Racer*. It is a legitimately great anti-gravity racing game that does something really different to *WipEout* or *F-Zero*, which I really appreciate.

AK Bell
X-Wing Alliance. *TIE Fighter* is better, but this dragged me into the world of MP dogfights and online clubs playing custom missions. Check out emperorshammer.org

Andrew Walker
It's not exactly retro, but my favourite is the 2015 *Star Wars: Battlefront*. It looks so beautiful and plays really well.

Lex Joy
For me, it's *The Empire Strikes Back* on the Atari 2600. It recognises that half the fun of the *Star Wars* universe is imagining yourself as an inhabitant of the place, so instead of making you Luke or Han or the like, it lets you play a bit part that your imagination can fill in as you please.

Psi/Ben
My favourite *Star Wars* game is still *Knights Of The Old Republic*. It ticks all the boxes for me in that, it's a cracking game, fun to play with a top story. It uses the IP but doesn't tread on it in a way that completely confuses canon.

Michal Nemec
Star Wars: TIE Fighter is one of the best space flight sims ever made. Some missions are like solving real-time puzzles. And then of course *Knights Of The Old Republic*, because that twist is great.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

STAR LETTER

PHOTO FAN

» This photo reminds us that our arcades weren't all stereotypical neon-lit spaces with colourful carpets.

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Thank you for the magazine – it's a monthly treat which I feel brings me closer to the retro community.

I was fascinated to read Nick's My Retro Life feature on looking at old photos in issue 227 and the accompanying memories shared by readers. It got me reminiscing about my favourite arcade experience and how I wish it was captured for posterity in its prime.

The arcade in question was in the Metro Centre in Gateshead which I visited frequently between 1996 and 2002. It was right next to the car park so you'd have to walk through it to get into the shopping centre and this had such an impact on me as a kid. There were countless arcade classics on display, all competing noisily for attention. Sessions spent on *Virtua Tennis*, *Crazy Taxi* and *Silent Scope* were formative experiences for me which have shaped my passion for games. The thing is, there's hardly any photo evidence that it ever existed.

Or is there? How about a feature on the arcade memories of your readers where we're asked to submit photos and brief anecdotes of the experiences of some of our favourite arcade spots from yesteryear? It would be a great way to gather everyone's random images and preserve these memories within your excellent magazine.
Michael Normington

Glad to hear you enjoyed such a personal feature, Michael. Funnily enough, Nick had a similar problem finding photos of Harlow's Sega Park arcade for issue 238. We certainly like your idea too – we feature modern collection photos, but not ones of how we used to play. So readers, how do you feel about creating a shared photographic history with us?

» We love the idea of showing off our favourite gaming spots in their prime.

» [PC] While many enjoyed the *Terminator 2D: No Fate* feature, we're always grateful for constructive feedback like Graham offered.

TERMINATOR 2 FAR

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
I got through reading issue 275, and the small box out on the letters page reminded me of the previous issue (274) and how I felt about the inclusion of the article for the new game *Terminator 2D: No Fate*. The cover of the mag was superb – easily one of the best in ages. It really looked amazing, so I feel conflicted with the fact it was a new game.

However, when I saw how many pages were devoted to the actual game (ten – which I understand because it was on the cover after all), I was a little dismayed. Is this the start of a new trend, I thought?

There's plenty of review coverage for new retro-styled games in the review section of the magazine. Large editorials on new games (even if inspired by retro stylings) are just not interesting to me. New games are not history, and for me, **Retro Gamer** was always about the history of games. Yes there is a place in the magazine to celebrate the new games, but I hope it doesn't take up another ten pages of such a great magazine.

I'd expect you'll be flooded with other game-makers wanting similar coverage – increasing the possibility of more articles like this. You could have a section devoted to the Making Of for a new game, but I suggest it be limited to a two to four-page spread article, and not be the cover star.

Anyhoo, I felt the need to share my thoughts, but as always, I love the magazine and keep up the amazing work.
Graham Plowman

Thanks for taking the time to provide such a thoughtful and balanced explanation of why that feature wasn't for you, Graham. Hopefully it was reassuring to see that *Shinobi: Art Of Vengeance* only formed part of our series cover feature in issue 276. History will always be our primary focus.

We knew we were taking a chance by putting *Terminator 2D: No Fate* on the cover, but felt that it was worthwhile because the developer has strong pedigree, the licence itself is an old film, the game is retro in style and is intended to come to classic hardware too. Sales and reader feedback for the game were broadly positive, so we can't rule out a similar cover in the future, but it would need to meet a similarly high bar. They certainly won't become common.

ARINO AFICIONADO

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
First time subscriber, so I'm a bit late to the party. (Can one still say that 20 years later?) I've been

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Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

» Gary's a big fan of *GameCenter CX*, and has a great selection of merchandise to prove it.

highly enjoying the back issues I've been able to get my hands on, though you're a bit more elusive this side of the pond.

During your tenure in journalistic excellence, have you ever done a feature on *GameCenter CX*? As a huge fan of the Kacho, I would love to see a deep dive into their story. You guys are only two months apart in age, and he is the 'Retro Game Master', as it appeared over here briefly in the States; there's a lot in common.
Gary Allshouse

Thanks for subscribing, Gary. Nick would love to feature the show, as he has been a fan of it ever since finding fan subs for the second series and watching Arino struggle with *Atlantis No Nazo*. Leave it with us, and we'll do our best to make it happen.

ENCHANTING ENIGMA

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
After years of owning it, I finally started playing *Enchanted Folk And The School Of Wizardry* on the Nintendo DS a few weeks ago and I'm thoroughly enjoying it. I was wondering if you've ever covered it and if not, would you maybe consider it for a future issue. I'd love to know a little about its history and other people's thoughts on it.
Keep up the good work.
Joel Weaver

We haven't covered this one, and you can imagine our surprise when we discovered how much it sells for these days. That's a nice game to own! The concept of a magic-themed *Animal Crossing*-alike is interesting, so we'll look into it and see what we can conjure up.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Milestone memories

As Darran approaches his 20th anniversary on the **Retro Gamer** team, he's decided to look back at his tenure in the editor's chair, sharing anecdotes and behind-the-scenes facts about the magazine. Nick has occasionally been chiming in with more detail in quote posts, too. There are far too many to even begin listing them here, but you can check out all of the posts on BlueSky at the following link: bit.ly/RGAnecdotes

» *Enchanted Folk* sells for over £100, so don't pass up on it if you see it cheap.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Banjo-Kazooie memory?

» [N64] "Banjooo!" Yes this is a reference to *Space Ghost* and, no, it doesn't make much sense.

Luke The Fox VA
I first got the game for Christmas 2000 and I love the huge vibrant worlds and the silly British humour. I remember talking to my family about it over Christmas dinner.

MeltingMan234
I remember watching a promo VHS tape for the game at a friend's house. I was amazed with the levels and stuff they showed off. And that game was the reason I got a Nintendo 64.

Matteo Fossi
Being traumatised by the shark in Treasure Trove Cove at the age of eight. Come on, it shaped my childhood courage.

ZombiWorkshop
I grew up with all the *Banjo* games, and my fave memory was with *Nuts & Bolts*. From unlocking the first few boxes and breaking the level boundaries with the things I created, to then unlocking so many pieces that I was creating walking robots and strange unfolding contraptions just for the fun of it!

SGarveyC
Still my favourite game. Unforgettable characters, hysterical dialogue, and an amazing soundtrack by the legendary Grant Kirkhope. The star will forever be Mumbo Jumbo and his comical transformations. Oominaka!

James Hammond
I remember being mesmerised by the main hub world's music seamlessly changing depending on whichever level's entrance you were near. The variations were awesome!

Tom Anson
The GBA one is an underrated gem! I bought my copy in Game on the top floor of Debenhams when it released and loved it. I rarely hear it discussed now but if you loved the N64 games, it's worth a play. [Agreed – Ed]

Vince White
For me, it's *Banjo-Tooie* – despite the framerate issues. After the first game they expanded the world quite a bit, it was a much bigger game, but they added plenty of stuff so it didn't feel 'empty', and that was great. With sequels I always worry they'll just bang something out to cash in on the first game, but they did a lot with the hardware available.

Crow
My first introduction to *Banjo* was a swear-filled playthrough by Michael Jones (from Rooster Teeth) about 13 years ago. I've never actually beaten the game, but I've watched dozens of playthroughs and listened to the OST for at least a hundred hours!

Daniel James Diggle
I picked up *Banjo-Pilot* for the GBA only recently – never played it when younger – it's a great kart racer. The controls are a great twist on the genre and it looks gorgeous on the GBA. It is definitely one of the better additions to my games collection!

retro GAMER

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Cover image
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Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd, 26 Planetary Road, Willenhall, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk. For enquiries, please email: mfcommunications@futurenet.com

ISSN 1742-3155

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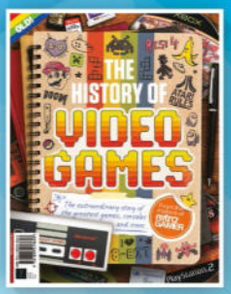

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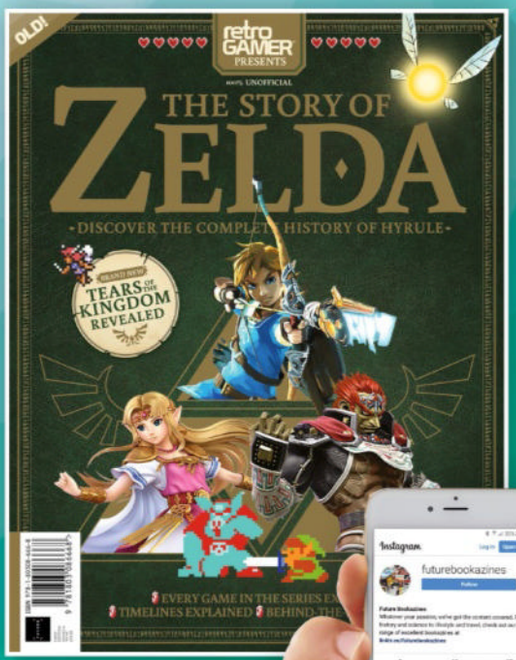

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The Legend Of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass

WHEN IT'S NOT ALWAYS GOOD TO TOUCH

» NINTENDO DS » 2007 » NINTENDO EAD

Nintendo's first *Zelda* game on the DS is a classic example of something being done purely for the sake of it.

I'm not talking about its clever use of the touch-screen for drawing handy hints on the map for when you're exploring, or how it can be used to carefully draw a route when you're sailing the game's ocean. Both of those examples are excellent and I've lost count of the many times I've been exploring the Temple Of The Ocean King and would have missed something important if I hadn't scribbled a note down on the screen.

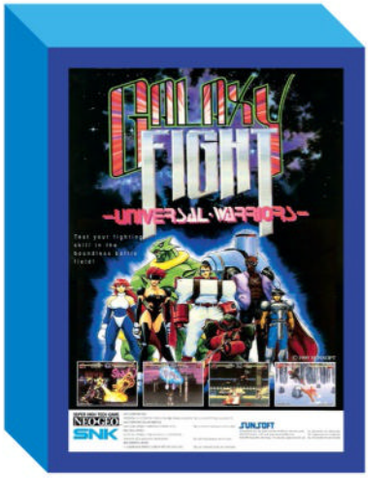
Where I have an issue with *Phantom Hourglass* is Nintendo's insistence on making Link only controllable via the stylus. I understand the thinking behind it – after all, if you're going to make the stylus such an important tool during play you may as well go all-in, but it doesn't quite sit right with me.

I absolutely remember being irked by it on release, but not so much that it put me off playing, and to be honest, it still doesn't stop me now, but it's a pity that Nintendo never gave us an option to use traditional controls. Controlling Link with the d-pad just gives you more of a physical connection with him than prodding with a stylus and it also feels like you have that little bit more agency over him as well.

Clever modders have made it possible to play the game with traditional controls, so it's not like Nintendo couldn't have made it an option, it just didn't want to. *Zelda* is a flagship series for Nintendo, so using it to push your system does make perfect sense, it's just a shame that that choice was simply made for you. ✱

Menu

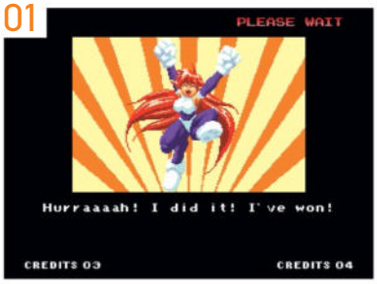
ENDGAME



GALAXY FIGHT (NEO GEO, 1995)

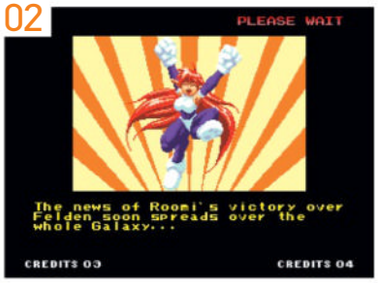
» Felden is a bad kind of dude. He invaded a planet called Rozalis, destroyed it and placed a curse upon it, and now Alvan is fighting to protect the lives of the planet's few remaining inhabitants. But you're not playing as Alvan – you picked Roomi, and she's not even from Rozalis. So what happens when she takes on Felden and wins? Let's skip to the end and find out...

01



» Congratulations have to go to Roomi! The evil Felden has been vanquished. So, what becomes of Rozalis? We'll never actually find out – instead, the young woman just basks in the glory of her victory.

02



» It's a pretty big deal when you manage to beat up some guy who can destroy a whole planet, so the intergalactic news organisations report on Roomi's triumph. How will she respond?

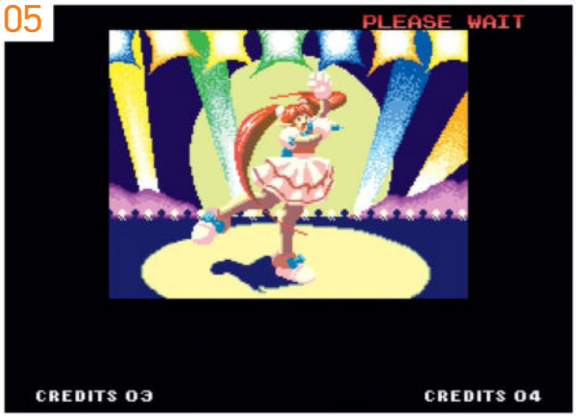
03

» She'll use her newly acquired fame to become a pop singer who also fights, of course. You didn't see that coming? Her combat attire is gone, replaced by the kind of frilly dress so beloved of Japanese idols.

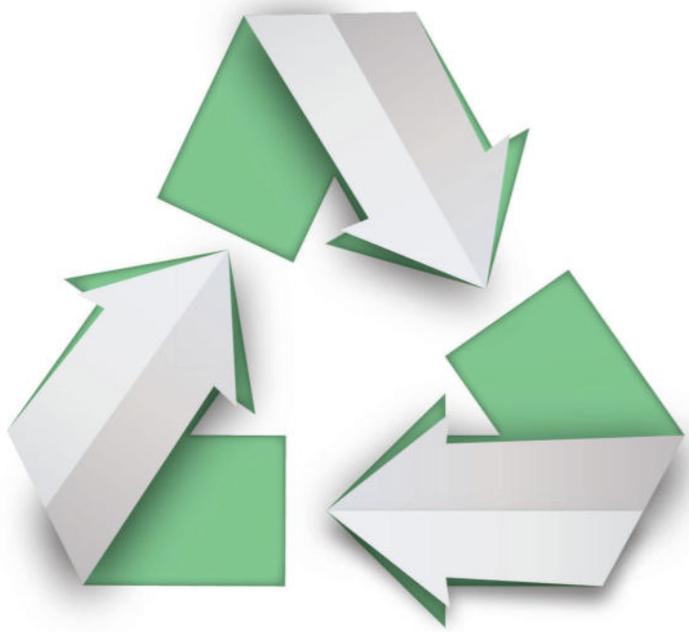
04

» Roomi grabs the microphone and asks for everyone's attention. Is she going to make some kind of profound speech? Maybe about the dangers of intergalactic warfare, and the societal conditions that allow power-hungry villains like Felden to rise to power in the first place?

05



» No, she's going to sing a song – a song that mostly turns out to be about punching, which is unusual in the pop genre. Unfortunately, she declares herself to be the cutest in the world at the conclusion of her song, prompting a decade-long feud with the pro wrestling idol Maki Itoh.



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